

# ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

During the Tannaitic Period (10-220 C.E.)

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ELIEZER EBNER

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# ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

During The Tannaitic Period (10-220 C.E.)

By

ELIEZER EBNER

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TO MY DEAR WIFE  
LIBBY



## Preface

The purpose of this book is to state the principles and describe the conditions of elementary Jewish education in Palestine during the first two centuries of the common era, a span of time that is known in Jewish history as the tannaitic period.

The choice of this period is the result of the author's belief, that it was then that the foundations of organized elementary education on a democratic basis were laid and its structure developed. A second consideration has been the hope, that through a limitation to a narrower frame of time, geographical setting and topical treatment than other comparable studies have confined themselves to, greater accuracy of results may be achieved.

This hope has been strengthened by a greater array of source material than has hitherto been presented. This is of particular importance, since the information we possess is altogether scant and of a fragmentary character. Considerable restraint is therefore required upon the exercise of imagination that would expand few and isolated references into general conclusions. Indeed this temptation has led some writers on the subject to the attempt to bridge the many gaps in our knowledge with unsupportable assumptions.

The information on early Jewish education that is offered in the standard books on the history of education is very meagre and chiefly deals with the pre-Christian era. Of the special studies that were made in this field only few are comprehensive. The most notable of the latter is the book — "The Jewish School," by Nathan Morris which appeared some eighteen years ago. But there, too, a proper care for chronological and geographical differences has not always been preserved. E.g., despite their cultural kinship, references that pertain to the Babylonian scene cannot be taken to reflect automatically similar conditions in Palestine, for political and economic circumstances were different in the two countries. Nor must a

statement of a scholar who lived a hundred years later apply to the earlier period.

This treatise is presented in an introduction and two parts. The introduction is concerned with the historical setting of the tannaitic period and its concept of Jewish education. The first part deals with the child, the teacher and the school. The discussion on the child revolves around the pre-school education he received, his legal and social status and the influence home and community exerted upon him. The chapter on the school is an analysis of the origin and development of the elementary school system. The second part is concerned with the school in operation. Its three chapters deal with the organization of the school, the curriculum of instruction and the methods used in teaching this curriculum.

I feel deeply indebted to my teachers of Dropsie College for the aid they gave me in the preparation of this dissertation, as well as for the intellectual stimulation I received in their classes. To Professor Leo Honor for his counsel and encouragement; to Professor I. B. Berkson for his many judicious suggestions and to Professor Solomon Zeitlin, whose vast erudition was most valuable in the examination of the source material. I should also like to thank Professor Abraham Neuman, whose lectures in Jewish history have greatly enriched my knowledge and thinking on the period under discussion.

With no less gratitude I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to my friends in Long Branch, N. J., who aided me in the publication of this book. While there are many more, I do wish to enumerate the names of Mr. and Mrs. Israel Adlerblum, Mrs. Bernard Peskoe, Mr. Samuel Sterenbuch and Mr. Ira Katchen. Their faithful perseverance was a true reflection of their innate goodness.

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# Introduction

## 1. CULTURAL-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

## 2. CONCEPTS OF EDUCATION

The investigation of the educational concepts and practices of the Jews of Palestine in the tannaitic era is of importance for the following reasons: (a) the elementary school on a country wide scale was then introduced and developed and (b) the general attraction of this period for the student of Jewish history. For there is hardly another period in the long history of the Jewish people that fills a comparable span of time with such a colorful panorama of political changes, spiritual fermentation and new orientations. During these two hundred years the small Jewish people, living at the crossroad of continents and civilization, fought three desperate wars to maintain its national independence against the greatest power on earth—imperial Rome—and failed. But during the same time it also fought for the right to live its own way of life—and this struggle it won.

How firmly this way of life was rooted in the minds of the people and how well it was passed on to the youth is indicated in the following assertions:

Seneca, the Roman philosopher and statesman of the first century C.E., indirectly pays tribute to the effectiveness of Jewish education, when he says: "They (the Jews) at least know the reason of their ceremonies, but the mass of the rest of mankind do not know what and why they do."<sup>1</sup> Josephus, his contemporary and the foremost Jewish historian of his time, more than corroborates Seneca's statement: "But should anyone of our nation be questioned about the laws, he would repeat them all more readily than his own name. The result, then, of our thorough grounding in the laws from the

first dawn of intelligence is that we have them, as it were, engraven on our souls.”<sup>2</sup> And again, with even greater emphasis, he tells his readers: Above all we pride ourselves on the education of our children, and regard as the most essential task in life the observance of our laws and of the pious practices, based thereupon which we have inherited.”<sup>3</sup> Philo of Alexandria, who flourished at the beginning of the first century C.E. likewise points to widespread education among Jews and offers this reason for it: “Since the Jews esteem their laws as divine revelations, and are instructed in the knowledge of them from their earliest youth, they bear the image of the law in their souls.”<sup>4</sup> So does R. Meir, a leading Tanna of the second century, when he says: “There is no Jew who does not fulfill hundred Mitzvot each day; he reads the Shema and recites the benedictions before and after it, he eats bread and recites the benedictions before and after it, he prays the “Eighteen Benedictions” three times and he fulfills other Mitzvot and recites the benedictions pertaining to them.”<sup>5</sup> And finally, a later source, at ca. 200 C.E., puts the number of elementary schools which existed in Jerusalem prior to its destruction in the year 70 C.E. at 394.<sup>6</sup>

## A. CULTURAL-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

To understand the underlying reasons for so intensive and widespread an adherence to education it is necessary to consider the cultural-historical setting of the tannaitic period.

A proper date with which to commence this discussion is the year 445 B.C.E. For in that year a great religious rededication assembly under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah was held in Jerusalem at which time the Mosaic legislation of the Pentateuch was ratified as the constitution of the people.<sup>7</sup> To describe the form of government that was charged with the administration of these laws, which applied to religious and secular matters and which were held to be of divine origin, Josephus coined a new term—Theocracy—which ascribes “the authority and power to God.”<sup>8</sup>

The head of this Theocracy was the High Priest. Deprived of their national sovereignty, but permitted communal autonomy, the Jews of Palestine centered in the office of the High Priest their

national cravings and spiritual aspirations. He not only was the head of the Temple hierarchy but also the President of the Keneset Hagedolah, or "Great assembly" and later of the Gerusia—the Council of the Elders.<sup>9</sup> The Keneset Hagedolah was a legislative body whose members were called Soferim or Scribes and it flourished for some 200 years. Faced with the task of rebuilding Jewish life and securing for it deeper foundations and wider acceptance than existed in the time of the First Commonwealth, the "Men of the Great Assembly" worked in the direction which Ezra had charted in his reforms. In order to popularize the knowledge of Torah Ezra had introduced the more familiar "Assyrian"—or square script for the writing of the Bible and enacted that public readings of the Torah should be held not only on the Sabbath morning but also in the afternoon and on every Monday and Thursday.<sup>10</sup> The Mishnah ascribes to them the demand to "raise up many students."<sup>11</sup> The Talmud also credits them with the organization of the liturgy.<sup>12</sup> It was also during that period that the Bible, except for a few controversial books, was canonized as the authoritative sacred literature of the Jewish people.<sup>13</sup>

The theocratic form of government came to an end with the revolt of the Maccabees in the year 165 B.C.E. Practically it had ceased to exist even before, when some Hellenized High Priests, alienated from the masses of the people, had occupied the high office by the grace of the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes. The functions of the High Priest as legislator and supreme justice were assumed by the Sanhedrin, a supreme court of 71 members, presided over by a duumvirate (Zugot) of two distinguished scholars. The first of the Zugot were Jose b. Joezer and Jose b. Johanan who lived during the Maccabean period, while the last two were Hillel and Shammai who flourished about 150 years later.<sup>14</sup> The political power of the High Priest passed into the hands of the Hasmonean princes who merged this office with that of the temporal ruler. With the capture of Jerusalem by the Romans and the destruction of the Temple in the year 70 C.E. the priestly hierarchy and the last vestiges of national independence came to an end. The sole Jewish governing body that then remained the people was the supreme rabbinic court. The type of government this body administered henceforth and all during tannaitic

times in Palestine is best described as a Nomocracy, or the Rule of the Law, the "Law" being the Written and Oral Law of the Torah.<sup>15</sup>

The Oral Law or Halakah is mostly of ancient origin, dating back as far as the Mosaic legislation. The term "Halakah" is derived from the word "halok" which means "to go" or "to walk." It is therefore a descriptive expression of the fact that the usages, customs and mores embraced by this term were living and "current" among the people. The task the scribes set for themselves was to find the basis for these oral laws in the text of the Bible and thus enhance their validity and point to their divine origin. Likewise new laws, made necessary by new conditions and circumstances, were based upon the words of the Scripture. The method of interpretation used was called "Midrash" which comes from the word "darosh," meaning "to search" and "to investigate."<sup>16</sup> On the surface it appears as if the Midrash Halakah preceded the Halakah. There was the text, then came its interpretation that revealed the hidden meaning and intent of the text and that in turn led to a new law. But in reality it was the Halakah that preceded the Midrash. The Soferim and their spiritual heirs, the Rabbis, were no theorists who sat in the houses of study and academies and thought out new laws in accordance with whatever results the exegesis of a verse would produce. When Israel lived on its own land and pursued the multifarious activities of daily life new problems originating in the ever changing stream of life arose and demanded attention and judgment. The new decision arrived at with the aid of certain hermeneutic rules was then added to the ever growing body of the oral laws.<sup>17</sup>

The halakic exegesis dealing with the norms of conduct had its counterpart in the agadic exposition of the Bible which aimed at the quality of this conduct and beyond to the endless possibilities of human perfection. The sources of the Agada are the folklore and the Midrash Haggadah. The folklore Agada is of early origin and is woven around Biblical personages. Each successive generation added to this popular treasure of truth, fancy and moral exhortations in the light of its own standards of thinking, recreating the heroes of early Jewish history into prototypes to be emulated at its own and later times. Part of this Agada has been preserved in the extant Apocryphal books, the words of Philo and Josephus and the Talmud, while more

of it must have been current in the oral traditions of the people. The Midrash Haggadah is by far the more important source for the Agada. While the Midrash Halakah examined the text with a view to its legal content and implication the Midrash Haggadah deduced from it moralizing and edifying truths. These were often embellished and expanded in order to make their message more effective. The religious gatherings in the synagogue, when the Torah was read and explained, were the natural occasions to impart the teachings of the Agada. The teacher often turned preacher. Whether he wished to impress his listeners with the need to be better Jews, or to illumine a problem that agitated the community, or infuse courage and faith during the many turbulent times of the Second Commonwealth, he would invoke the ideals of the Torah through the use of parable, allegory, proverb and story.<sup>18</sup> Thus the Agada proved to be an important educative instrument that reached out to the masses of the people, implanting and strengthening the intangible values of faith, piety and loyalty, the depth of which was revealed during some of the most critical moments in the history of that period.<sup>19</sup>

The aversion to commit the teachings of the Oral Law to writing applied to both, Halakah and Agada. As late as the third century C.E. a scholar asserted that "oral teachings must not be rendered in writing."<sup>20</sup> But as in the case of the Halakah, the agadic material that accumulated in the course of time was too vast to be retained orally. The situation, in the words of another contemporary scholar, became an "impossible" one and the danger was real that "Torah would be forgotten" if concessions to the limitations of man's memory would not be made.<sup>21</sup>

Yet the literary activity of the Palestinian Jews did not terminate with the canonization of the Bible. From ca. 300 B.C.E. to 100 C.E. they created, what is known as the books of the Apocrypha.<sup>22</sup> The content of these books must be understood in the spirit of the times in which they were written. The work of the Soferim had born fruit. Simon the Just, a High Priest at the middle of the third century, accorded Torah the first place, above the Temple service and the practice of kind social deeds. <sup>23</sup> The zeal for Torah is a constant theme in books like Ben Sira, written in the rather peaceful and prosperous pre-Maccabean era,<sup>24</sup> or II Maccabess, where the tenacity

of the people to cling to the Law of their fathers is emphasized. The author of the Apocalyptic book "Jubilees" maintains, that not only the Written Law but also the Oral Law was revealed to Moses, that it existed from the beginning of time and that it will exist to the end of time.

Most of the Apocalyptic writings are assumed to have been written during the two centuries before—and after the common era, a period that is dominated by the shadow of imperial Rome. At first, in the time of the Maccabean brothers, a cloud on the political sky of Palestine, Rome soon became the decisive factor in the political affairs of the people. In 63 B.C. the Roman legions under Pompey took advantage of the rivalry of two Hasmonean brothers and conquered Jerusalem. The plea of the people for the abolition of royalty was disregarded. It was easier for Rome to control the people through collaborating rulers of its own choice. Rulers like Herod were regarded by the people as Kings of the Jews rather than Jewish Kings.<sup>25</sup> Their unpopularity only intensified the hopes and expectations of the people for the coming of the ideal king, the Messiah who was the scion of King David. The content of the Apocalyptic books reveal the pre-occupation with messianic ideas which were then in vogue. Two currents of thought are noticeable. One has a universal appeal and associates the Messiah with the ushering in of the golden age of spiritual bliss for the elect ones of all nations, and the other is concerned with the immediate restitution of the Davidic dynasty and the vindication of Israel's chosenhood.<sup>26</sup> The idea of a personal Messiah had been in the consciousness of the people in the preceding centuries in various degrees of intensity.<sup>27</sup> In the first century of the common era it stirred the people into fervent anticipation of his imminent arrival. So strong was this hope that even Hellenized Jews, living in comparative freedom in Egypt, were seized by it.<sup>28</sup>

It was in this climate of strong religious fermentation, evoked by national aspirations and deep spiritual yearnings, that Christianity arose. However, because it did not emphasize and satisfy the national element in Israel's messianic belief it was incapable of becoming a popular mass movement among Jews. When on the other hand, about a hundred years later Bar Cochba rallied the Jews in a heroic fight for national independence and religious freedom, he had the

support of the people. R. Akiba, the leading Tana, was convinced that Bar Cochba was the messianic King.<sup>29</sup>

A most important factor in the process of popularizing Torah and democratizing Jewish life is the institution of the Bet haKenesset or synagogue. The synagogue whose origin is obscure<sup>30</sup> was, as its name indicates, a "House of Assembly." Among ancient peoples there was no division between the religious—and secular spheres. "States and Church" did not occupy independent and separate domains, but permeated and influenced each other. The same held true of the Jews.<sup>31</sup> The synagogue was not, as it is today, a purely religious institution. but rather a communal center, where the people met for prayer, reading and interpretation of the Torah as well as for discussion of local and national problems<sup>32</sup> and a place where scholars studied and children received their elementary instruction. The fact that the synagogue was used by the scholars and their students for study purposes bestowed upon the Bet haKenesset still another name—Bet haMidrash. In larger communities the Bet haMidrash eventually occupied its own locale and was considered to have more sanctity than the synagogue.<sup>33</sup> When the national sanctuary and capital were destroyed the foundations had been well laid to secure the continuity of Judaism. The synagogue became to the people a "small sanctuary." The frequent public readings of the Bible, their translation into the vernacular and the halakic and agadic discourses woven around them offered unique opportunities for popular education that brought knowledge and moral enlightenment even to the untutored Jew. Both the Bet haKenesset and the Bet haMidrash, each on its level of education and influence, fulfilled their historic mission to attach the Jewish people to its Torah.

The leaders of Jewish life in tannaitic times showed great zeal in the popularization of learning. They believed that an intensive program of education, rooted in a broad democratic basis and beginning at an early age level, would ensure the observance of the commandments, foster the spirit of piety and strengthen the bonds of national unity. In earlier times the Torah and its interpretation in accordance with the Oral Law was the strongest weapon in the hands of the Pharisees to counteract the overbearing power of the priestly hierarchy, royal presumptions, Sadducean assimilationist tendencies and

Hellenist inroads. After the destruction of the Temple and more so after the fall of Betar at 135 C.E. Torah in the hands of the Rabbis proved to be even of greater efficacy, for it saved the people from despair, defeatism and disintegration.<sup>34</sup> R. Johanan ben Zakkai evaluated the causes which led to the fall of Jerusalem in these words "You did not want to serve God, therefore you must serve now the nations; you did not want to pay the half Shekel for the Temple, therefore you must pay now fifteen Shekel to the government of your enemies."<sup>35</sup> But his criticism was constructive. He established an academy at Jabneh, a town not far from Jaffa and Lydda, as the new center of authority and instruction.<sup>36</sup>

The extent of the catastrophe resulting from the Bar Cochba revolt surpassed in its physical aspects even the outcome of the war of the year 70.<sup>37</sup> From this blow Palestine's Jewry never fully recovered. The Judean province became almost deserted. Many of the survivors settled in Galilee and others emigrated to Babylonia and Arabia. Galilee, having suffered less from the ravages of war, became the new center of Jewish life. The hopes for the establishment of the messianic kingdom were not given up, but were projected into the time, when it would please God in His own day to send the Messiah. Nothing was left to the people but to accept the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven and the rule of the Torah.<sup>38</sup> R. Eleazar b. Simeon, apparently having in mind the suicidal effects of future rebellions against Rome offered this advice to his people: "The book and the sword descended together from heaven. If you will keep the Torah, written in the book, you will be safe from the sword, but if not, you will be punished through it."<sup>39</sup> The people chose the "book." To what extent knowledge and observance of Torah and Mitzvot were regarded criteria of prestige is indicated in this Mishnaic assertion: "A bastard who is a scholar is superior to a High Priest who is an ignoramus."<sup>40</sup>

The political upheavals and economic dislocations, caused by the wars against Rome, were followed by a period of new adjustments and consolidation. The crowning achievement of this era is the codification of the Oral Law in the Mishnah. The redaction of the Mishnah, carried out under the leadership of R. Judah I, who for some fifty years was the recognized head of the Jews of Palestine, in

cooperation with other scholars, occurred at ca. 220 C.E. This date brings the tannaitic era to a close.

## B. CONCEPTS OF EDUCATION

Jewish education in tannaitic times was dedicated to a twofold aim—Torah and Mitzvot. The achievement of the first is an intellectual task, while the latter is a practical one that aims at right conduct. Both of these aims become means again to serve the overall ideal of human perfection, which is stated in the Torah as the ideal of holiness: "Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy."<sup>41</sup> The dedication to a continuous striving for ethical perfection is the keynote of all Jewish education. The pursuit to reach this aim could never come to an end, because the possibilities for improvement were, except for the limitations set by mental and physical endowment, inexhaustible. It is in harmony with this idea, that ancient Jewish moralists pleaded so earnestly for the acquisition of the virtue of humility. Because as they measured themselves with the criterion of the absolute and the infinite they could not help but feel of small stature and significance.

"Torah" is translated at times as "teaching" or "instruction" and other times "law."<sup>42</sup> But none of these translations alone is sufficient to do full justice to the meaning of Torah. Torah is a "teaching," but an authoritative one, a teaching that not only proposes and recommends but also imposes and commands.<sup>43</sup> The German translation for Torah—"Gesetzeslehre" is more correct, because it combines both aspects inherent in Torah—law and teaching. Later on the term "Torah" was expanded to refer not only to the Written Law but also to the authoritative oral teachings. Shammai informs a pagan, that the Jews had two Torot: "a written Torah and an oral Torah." R. Eleazar b. Azariah uses the "words of the Torah" and the "words of the sages" interchangeably.<sup>44</sup> Having invaded the privacy of R. Akiba in order to observe his conduct, Ben Azzai excuses himself with the words: "It is Torah, and I desire to learn it."<sup>45</sup>

A few examples of the veneration in which Torah was held by the people will help to explain the unfaltering dedication of the Jews to educate their children in its spirit and knowledge.

The Torah, it was said, existed 947 generations prior to the creation of heaven and earth and being endowed with a life of its own, it joined with the angels to sing daily praises to God, until it was given to Israel.<sup>46</sup> Although the Torah was given to the Jewish people, yet as an emanation of divine wisdom it possessed universal appeal and validity.<sup>47</sup> By no means could a principle of the Torah ever be abrogated. Not even a single letter of the text could ever be abolished. R. Simon b. Yohai tells, how the book of Deuteronomy is reassured by God, that "a Solomon and thousands like him shall perish, but nothing of the Torah will be abrogated."<sup>47</sup> Torah was believed to possess curative and protective powers. The Talmud relates, how R. Johanan b. Zakkai removed the curse of early deaths that afflicted a family in Jerusalem, through the advice: "Go and study the Torah and you will live."<sup>48</sup> The study of Torah, it was believed, would serve as a protection against the suffering that would precede the coming of the Messiah.<sup>49</sup>

The basis for all these speculations and embellishments on the nature of Torah, as well as for its unqualified acceptance, was the belief in the super-natural origin of the Torah. It was the "Torah of God."<sup>50</sup> To strengthen this belief and guard it against misleading influences, the Rabbis found it necessary to reiterate emphatically the fact of the Sinaitic revelation, invoking upon the disbeliever the loss of life in the world to come.<sup>51</sup> The other two divisions of the canon—Prophets and Hagiographa—were of lesser sanctity; they were believed to be divinely inspired writings whose content is intimated in the words of the Pentateuch.<sup>52</sup>

The belief in the divine character of the Bible led to the following educational principles: (1) unchangeability of curriculum, (2) early indoctrination, (3) Torah study a life long pursuit and (4) popular scope of education.

1. *Unchangeability of Curriculum*: With the conclusion of the canon and a few emendations of the text by the Soferim<sup>53</sup> the Bible remained the permanent text book of instruction. It seemed inconceivable that this text should ever be changed. For changes arise out of imperfections, but divine teachings could not be but perfect. As Maimonides puts it: "The whole Torah, now in our possession is the same that was given to Moses" and "that this Torah will not be

changed and that there will be no other Torah given by the Creator.”<sup>54</sup> With regard to the Oral Law, however, this inflexibility applied only to the teaching of those oral teachings which came down from remote times and were undisputedly accepted. Those Halakot which were controversial, were taught in their different versions and the names of the disputing schools or individual scholars were quoted. Opportunity was thus given to teacher and student to subject the various halakic opinions to the scrutiny of reason and research in terms of scriptural exegesis and halakic analogies. The availability of agadic materials woven in and around the text helped to soften the rigidity of the subject matter of instruction. This held true even of the elementary level. Telling the children tales and parables, culled from folklore and Midrashim, the teacher would break up the tediousness of long hours of instruction, while at the same time instilling a pious disposition to fulfill the laws of the Torah.

The stability and continuity of the study program under all circumstances was demonstrated in the post-Bar Cochba years, when the study of the Torah had been prohibited by the Romans. It was then decided on the highest rabbinic authority, that the study of the Torah must go on, regardless of any consequence, including capital punishment.<sup>55</sup> The Jewish educational system indeed continued to exist in Palestine and the lands of the Diaspora, long after the political, social and economic conditions that prevailed at the time this system originated had disappeared.

2. *Early Indoctrination*: The Torah, the Jew believed, was given to him for the welfare of body and soul in this life and for the spiritual bliss in the world to come. To introduce his son at the earliest time to such a discipline of life, the father thought to be an act of love and wisdom as well as of piety.

However, the Rabbis did not rely upon the voluntary application of this conclusion by the father. They imposed upon him the duty to give his son an early start on the road to the good life.<sup>56</sup> In a controversy on the question, when the minor is duty bound to make his appearance at the Temple on the three pilgrim festivals, the Shammaites decide that this duty begins as soon as the boy is able to make the trip up the Temple mount on his father's shoulders. The School of Hillel is more lenient, demanding the visit only after the boy has

grown enough to ascend the mount at his father's side.<sup>57</sup> The idea of introducing his son early and progressively into the fulfillment of the commandments is repeatedly urged upon the father. The Mishnah states briefly: "A minor who knows how to shake the Lulab is obligated to do it." And the Tosefta continues in greater detail: "If he no longer needs his mother (at night), he is obligated to sit in the Sukkah; if he knows how to put on the fringes, he is required to do it; if he knows how to handle the T'fillin, his father gets him a pair; and if he is able to speak, his father teaches him to recite (the verses beginning with) "Sh'ma" and "Torah" and speaks to him in Hebrew."<sup>58</sup>

The Hebrew term that fits the pre-school education is "Hinuk," while the term most appropriate of the later form of education is "Limud." "Hinuk" refers to an education, acquired through doing things, namely the practice of Mitzvot, while "Limud" pertains to the acquisition of intellectual knowledge, namely the study of Torah, called "Talmud Torah."

The term "Hinuk" has two meanings, both of which point to the purpose of Jewish education and are applicable to the education of the young child. It is used as "dedication" and "training." In the sense of dedication it appears as "dedication of the altar," "dedication of a house," "dedication of the wall of Jerusalem," dedication of graves," etc.<sup>59</sup> In the latter meaning it occurs in the verse: "Train a boy in accordance with his nature."<sup>60</sup> To prepare boys and girls for their ability to fast on Yom Kippur, the Mishnah says: "But they are trained a year or two in advance." Or the High Priest was wont to offer the sacrifices of the week prior to Yom Kippur, "to get him trained to do it."<sup>61</sup>

Thus, training his son in the observance of the Mitzvot and participation in the communal rites, the father dedicated him to live the Jewish way of life.

3. *Torah Study a Life Long Pursuit*: The Jew was expected to be a life long student of the Torah. No completion of its study was thought possible, because the study of divine wisdom could never be exhausted. Its study was considered both an end in itself as well as a means to an end. As an end of its own, Talmud Torah was accorded priority in case of conflict with such moral postulates as respect for

parents, practice of kind deeds and peace making among men.<sup>62</sup> As means to an end the Torah study should lead to the application of its teachings in daily life. Neither pre-occupation with gaining a livelihood and raising a family nor abject poverty or extreme wealth were accepted as excuses for not studying the Torah as much as it was possible. Whether with regard to age or the allocation of spare time, it was held, that "Talmud Torah has no limit."<sup>63</sup> "Said R. Eleazar, even as the baby has to be nursed at all hours of the day, thus every Israelite ought to busy himself with the study of the Torah during all hours of the day." And Hillel lost his proverbial patience and love as he commented on this subject: "He who does not study deserves to die."<sup>64</sup>

There are two schools of thought in tannaitic sources on the question of what measure of devotion should be given to the study of Torah. One is the extreme view held by R. Simeon b. Yohai. It was uncompromising in its demand and called for an unreserved, total dedication to the ideal of Talmud Torah, to the extent of giving up all worldly pursuits. The question of how to exist he answered with faith in God. His opponent, R. Ishmael, held a more realistic point of view and advocated a harmonious synthesis of Talmud Torah and the engaging in a livelihood. About two hundred years later, Abaye, a Babylonian Amora, answers this problem on the basis of the past application of each point of view: "Many have followed B. Ishmael and have succeeded, while others who followed R. Simeon b. Yohai's view did not succeed."<sup>65</sup>

The weekly services in the synagogue, during which the Pentateuch and part of the Prophets were read and explained in cyclic fashion, derive their origin largely from the educational ideal and practical necessity, to enable every Jew to learn and appreciate the laws of the Torah. While the age of childhood and adolescence was the most propitious time for the acquisition of knowledge, the adult Jew remained nevertheless to a smaller or larger degree a student of the Torah for the rest of his life.

4. *Popular Scope of Education*: The Jewish people was unique among its contemporaries in the popular scope of its educational theory and system. To teach his son was a law of the Torah, that every father was duty bound to fulfill and Jewish leaders gave to the

prophetic ideal of "all your sons learned in the knowledge of God" (Isaiah 54, 13) their measure of devotion. The Torah was given to all Israel and its study was incumbent upon every Jew, regardless of social and economic station in life.

There is, however, in tannaitic sources one echo of the Greek notion, that education is a prerogative of the privileged whose wealth permits them the necessary "leisure" to attend "school."<sup>66</sup> With regard to higher education the Shammaites believed, that only those should be taught, who were "wise, modest, of good family and rich."<sup>67</sup> The Hillelites, on the other hand, were more democratic and imposed no restriction upon the admission of students. One of the arguments against the presidency of Gamaliel II at Jabneh was, that he had the doors of the academy not open to all students. Following his demotion "400 benches" were added to the academy.<sup>68</sup> The democratic outlook upon higher education prevailed. Numerous are the references to the poverty with which students and scholars had to contend. Many prominent scholars continued to derive their livelihood from manual labor. The criterion which determined their prestige and authority was mastery of Torah and an exemplary conduct of piety and righteousness.<sup>69</sup>

Three institutions served the ideal of popular education—the Bet haSefer, the Bet haMidrash and the Bet haKenesset. The popular scope of the Bet haMidrash, however, was limited to those students who had the desire, ability and means to attend an institution of secondary learning. The other two institutions—the Bet haSefer on the elementary level and the Bet haKenesset on the adult level—resemble each other in their dedication to mass education. But while the synagogue is more the product of natural growth rather than of deliberate planning, the elementary school owes its origin to the determined efforts of Jewish leaders, who sought to make it possible for all boys to receive a proper basic education.

The ideal of the good life, to whose attainment the Bet haSefer was called to make its contribution, was popularly stated as "Torah uMitzvot." Sometimes the expression *Torah uMa'asim Tovim* is used, a fact that indicates the flexibility of the term "Torah."<sup>70</sup> For surely, the ideal life includes not only the performance of the prescribed Mitzvot, but also the unlimited range of "good deeds." In the former

formulation "Torah" refers to the theory of Judaism, while in the latter it is understood as theory and practice. Applying the ideal of Torah and Mitzvot to the education of youth, it may be divided into these aims: Acquisition of knowledge (literary ability), training in the observance of the commandments and the development of a good character. The educative influences that came to the youth from his home and community were directed towards the last two aims. The program of the school was concerned with the attainment of the first objective, while the acquisition of the other two goals was more the result of indirect learning. As the home, school and community were dedicated to the same ideals and standards the education of the child could proceed in a spirit of harmony. His outlook upon life did not become confused because of contradicting influences which arose out of conflicting loyalties and antithetical ends.

The ideal of Torah and Mitzvot or Torah and good deeds stresses the harmonious interaction between theory and practice, between knowing and doing. While "learning leads to doing" and as Hillel put it "an ignoramus cannot be a pious person," it is equally true that "not study but doing is the main thing."<sup>71</sup> The more one would study, the more would the duties towards God and men become clear. This in turn would induce further search of knowledge to still more improve upon the quality of conduct. Basically the study of Torah is a means to an end, the highest end being holiness.<sup>72</sup> But so intimate is the relationship and interaction between means and ends, that the study of the Torah itself becomes a religious duty.

Jewish education was dedicated to still another harmonious synthesis—the balance between study and work. The same Rabbis whose highest joy it was to live in the "tent of the Torah," were earthly enough to propound a proper balance between body and soul, between a useful material occupation and intellectual pursuits. Part of the credit for the positive attitude towards manual labor must be given to the generally poor economic conditions of the tannaitic era, which tended to make of necessity a virtue. Because of the ideal and the efforts to popularize the study of the Torah and to study it Lishmah, i.e., for its own sake and not for personal aggrandizement or financial gain, it was important to emphasize the need and value of a gainful occupation, for "without bread there is no Torah."<sup>73</sup>

To teach his son a trade was one of the duties of the father. And he was warned, that if he failed in this obligation, he was practically preparing his son for "a life of robbery."<sup>74</sup> Work was appreciated yet for another reason. It was considered helpful in the prevention of sin. Idleness, the Mishnah feared, would lead to all sorts of troubles.<sup>75</sup> Work meant the employment of the physical capacities, the neglect of which would upset the balance between body and soul and lead to sin. This, the Rabbis were free to admit, might happen even to one who devotes himself entirely to the study of the Torah. Rabban Gamaliel III taught: "All Torah study that is not linked with a trade must eventually fail and cause sin."<sup>76</sup> The Mishnah puts this idea also in a positive form, stating that "he who studies the Bible and Mishnah and has a worldly occupation will not easily commit sins."<sup>77</sup>

Physical training, which played such an important role in Greek schools, was not taught in Jewish schools. While the Rabbis appreciated the worth of a healthy body, they opposed physical culture exercises. Their antagonism to the gymnasium was based upon the fear, that it would lead the youth to immorality and the assimilation of the pagan way of life. Some of these exercises, however, were known and practiced.<sup>78</sup> Whatever military training there was, came to an end with the defeat of the Jewish army in 135 C.E. The Talmud mentions a few acrobatic feats of some leading scholars, performed in the exuberance of a joyous occasion.<sup>79</sup> But these are only exceptional cases of unusual skill and no conclusion on athletic activities can be inferred from them. An allowance was made to the art of swimming. The Tosefta demands of the father to teach his son swimming.<sup>80</sup> The practical value of this request is obvious. It is dramatically illustrated in the story Josephus tells of himself, how he was shipwrecked and how he, together with six hundred men, swam for their lives.<sup>81</sup>

*Part I*

CHILD, SCHOOL AND TEACHER

I THE CHILD

II ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOL

III THE ELEMENTARY TEACHER



## CHAPTER I

### THE CHILD

"Behold, children are a heritage of the Lord" (Psalms 127, 3). These words reflect the attitude of Jewish parents towards children both in Biblical and post-Biblical times. The child was regarded a gift of God and the Biblical stories of Sarah, Leah, Rachel and Hannah portray vividly the desire and plea of Jewish mothers to be blessed with children. A Boraitha goes so far as to compare the childless to a dead person.<sup>1</sup>

The first law of the Torah enjoins man to procreate his own kind. As to the minimum number of children this law implies, the opinion is divided between the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel. According to the former, husband and wife should have at least two sons and two daughters, while the latter establishes the minimum at one child of each sex.<sup>2</sup> Sons were more desired than daughters. This preference the Jew shared with other contemporary peoples. Sons perpetuated the name and tradition of the family, while daughters, upon their marriage, were counted as members of another family. R. Judah I summed it up in these words: "The world needs both males and females, but happy is he whose children are sons."<sup>3</sup>

Even before the child was born he was a subject of wonderment to the Rabbis. Myth and legend were woven around his pre-natal existence. One question they were concerned with is the following. Since the child is born with a soul that was considered divine, why then is he morally and intellectually immature? In reply they explained, that the embryo is guarded by two angels who teach him all the knowledge of the Torah. But as soon as the child is ready to be born, an angel strikes a blow on his upper lip which causes him to forget all he had learned prior to his birth. The child then, very

much against his will, leaves his ideal habitat and comes into this world with a cry of protest.<sup>4</sup>

The sacredness of human life that Judaism taught, applied to the infant as soon as he was born. "One desecrates the Sabbath for the sake of a baby of one day, but not for the dead body of David, King of Israel."<sup>5</sup> The concern about the health of the infant was sufficient reason to postpone the otherwise unalterable date of circumcision.<sup>6</sup> Practices of infanticide, which were in vogue among some contemporary peoples, were unknown among Jews.<sup>7</sup> Judaism did not permit the distinction between desirable and undesirable offspring as far as survival was concerned. The life of each person was considered holy, whether boy or girl, rich or poor, strong or weak. The central position the family occupied in Jewish life was another safeguard for the life and health of the child. But surpassing even parental affection was the value Jewish thought placed upon the life of each individual, eliciting the mishnaic pronouncement, that "he who destroys one human life is compared to one who destroys the whole world."<sup>8</sup>

At the approximate age of three years the child was believed to enter upon the second stage of his life. On the average this used to be the age when he was weaned. The author of II Maccabees mentions a three years' nursing period. R. Eliezer thinks two years to be the correct nursing time, while his colleague, R. Joshua, sees nothing wrong in letting the child suckle up to his fourth or even fifth year.<sup>9</sup> The names for the little boy and girl were appropriately Tinok and Tinoket, meaning "suckling." This name became a term of endearment, as it was applied to boys and girls who were beyond the nursing stage for a number of years. E.g. "Tinokot of the school," a Tinoket who gets married, or R. Zadok calls a young priest officiating in the Temple by the name of "Tinok."<sup>10</sup> In the case of the girl the age of three years and one day opened a number of legal questions. Beginning with that age, if married, her status was that of any legally married woman. Up to that age, if raped, her virginity was believed to come back to her.<sup>11</sup>

By that time usually the child had begun to pronounce words. In the case of the boy, the father was asked to take advantage of the new ability and teach his son to recite two verses from the Torah.<sup>12</sup>

While the first literary instructions began at this stage, the participation of the little boy in the ceremonies and customs of his people had to begin at an even earlier age. A boy who no longer called his mother at night was required to sleep in the Sukkah. The Mishnah tells us, that Shammai was even more exacting. When his daughter-in-law gave birth to a son he converted the room where the baby was into a Sukkah.<sup>13</sup> Another Rabbi extended a similar privilege to the unsuspecting cradle occupant by adding him to nine male adults, in order to make up the quorum necessary to say grace together.<sup>14</sup> As he grew older he was progressively introduced into the observance of those Mitzvot which demanded a more active involvement. He learned to shake the Lulab, he put on the fringes and the phylacteries and, if capable enough, he was given the privilege to read publicly from the Torah and translate it into the Aramaic vernacular.<sup>15</sup> On the Day of Atonement boys and girls were expected to fast as long as they could, even though they had not attained as yet their religious maturity. R. Akiba, we are told, would on the eve of Yom Kippur interrupt his studies to make sure, that the children were fed well enough to sustain them during whatever time they would fast on the morrow.<sup>16</sup>

The age, at which the boy's mental and physical growth had developed sufficiently to allow him to share fully in his people's way of life, was set by the Rabbis to be thirteen years. His previous participation in the ritual was considered a training and preparation for the time when he became duty bound, as any adult, to observe all commandments. At the age of thirteen he became a Bar Mitzvah, a "Son of the Commandments."<sup>17</sup> There is no reference in the Talmud that would indicate a special ceremony in connection with his transition from the status of Katan, or minor to that of Gadol, or adult. The closest indication of some kind of a Bar Mitzvah celebration is the following passage in the tractate Soferim: "It also was a fine custom in Jerusalem to let the younger sons and daughters fast on the Day of Atonement—the eleven years old until the middle of the day and the twelve years old the whole day. Thereafter<sup>18</sup> to bring him before every elder, that he may bless him, encourage him and pray over him, that he may acquire Torah and good deeds."<sup>19</sup> This custom may be related to Josephus' remark about himself:

"While still a mere boy, about fourteen years old, I won universal applause for my love of letters."<sup>20</sup> Another reference declares this date to constitute a turning point in life, for "after thirteen years the good inclination is born."<sup>21</sup> Another source stresses the legal implications of this age, stating that with "thirteen years and one day his vows have legal validity."<sup>22</sup> The girl reached her religious maturity a year earlier. She was then required to observe those Mitzvot that were incumbent upon the woman.<sup>23</sup>

The chronological factor was not the only one to determine the maturity of the boy and girl. The physical changes which took place in the body and which changed from person to person were reckoned with and had their legal implications before and after the age of religious maturity. A boy of nine years, it was believed, could possess nubile potency, while on the other hand it was possible that pubic signs would appear as late as at the age of twenty years.<sup>24</sup> In the development of the girl, who "matured faster than the boy," there are recognized three definite stages, all predicated upon her physical growth. On the average these stages were dated (a) from three to twelve years, when she was called a "Ketanah," (b) then up to twelve years and six months, when she was called a "Na'arah" and (c) thereafter, when she was called a "Bogeret."<sup>25</sup> This rather early maturation resulted in the custom of giving the girl away in marriage at a young age, a practice that still prevails in oriental countries today.

The social and legal position of the child and the underlying psychology upon which this position is based, is evident in the attitude of the Halakah. In the eyes of the law the Katan, or minor is placed in the category of the deaf-mute and the imbecile, whose mental deficiency exempt them from any responsibility for committed actions.<sup>26</sup> If, for example, someone was unfortunate enough to have had an injurious encounter with any of the three, he is in a disadvantageous position, "for the one who harms them is liable, while if they do so to others, they are not liable."<sup>27</sup> The actions of the minor do not possess legal quality, because they lack the necessary mental foundation. In the matter of defilement therefore, where in addition to an overt act an intention is required, the action of the minor will not cause the defilement, because, as the Mishnah frequently puts it, "children can commit actions, but they have no

thoughts.”<sup>28</sup> Or rather they do have thoughts, but these are incoherent, fragmentary and not dependable. Their thinking is generated by impulses and momentary outside stimulations. It is dominated by feelings of likes and dislikes and it lacks the quality of consistency. It is guided by wishful thinking and imagination rather than by reason and logic. The testimony of children before the court is therefore not admissible.<sup>29</sup> Neither are their vows and evaluations legal, “because they have no understanding.”<sup>30</sup> Likewise is the Katan disqualified from performing an action that demands concentration and sustained effort, like ritual slaughtering and the public reading of the Scroll of Esther, even though such action does not require for its execution an understanding of its meaning and purpose.<sup>31</sup>

There is however also a positive aspect to the immaturity of the Katan. Whatever mischief and wrong the little boy or girl may have perpetrated, they would not be called evil or sinful, because their doings were not subject to moral evaluation. Children were considered to be pure and one Rabbi sympathetically exclaims: “Their very breath is free of sin.”<sup>32</sup> In the time of the Temple in Jerusalem children were employed to draw the water from the Shiloah spring, in order to ensure the ritual purity of the water needed for the Temple service.<sup>33</sup> The small sons of the Levites were permitted to enter the court yard of the Temple for the purpose of contributing the sweetness of their voices to the choir of the adult Levites.<sup>34</sup>

Plays and games, which take up so much of the time and attention of children, are scarcely mentioned in our sources. One Mishnah indirectly refers to a play with locusts that were given “to the Katan to play with.”<sup>35</sup> That children then, no less than they do today, loved to play soldiers may be inferred from the words: “helmets on the heads of children.”<sup>36</sup> The ubiquitous ball, stuffed with rags, had its place in the amusement of children and so had the toy wagon.<sup>37</sup>

Our attention so far has been chiefly focused on the boy, for it is he who occupied a much more important place in the educational system than did the girl. Yet it is necessary to discuss also the status and educational background of the girl, both for her own sake and for the part she played as future wife and mother in contributing her share to the proper functioning of the program of Jewish education.

The question of the girl’s literary education is related to the larger

problem of the position the Jewish woman occupied in life. The Jews shared with other peoples of antiquity the belief, that the woman was inferior to the man.<sup>38</sup> The tannaitic sources recorded a number of derogatory remarks of leading Tannaim at the expense of womanhood.<sup>39</sup> R. Eliezer and R. Joshua objected strongly to the idea, that a girl or a woman should study the Torah, supporting their view with very uncomplimentary reasons.<sup>40</sup> However it is a mistake to assume, that this inferiority implied a social stigma and a contemptuous attitude towards her. Nor must the cited remarks be taken to express an unqualified or generally accepted opinion of womanhood. For numerous are the praises, particularly of those women, who voluntarily took upon themselves various privations to make it possible for their husbands to study Torah or who brought their little sons daily to the Bet haSefer. R. Akiba paid public tribute to his wife, when he returned to her after years of study away from home. Turning to his students he exclaimed: "Mine (learning) and yours is all hers." There are even some instances reported of women who attained recognition of scholarship.<sup>41</sup>

It appears that earlier in the Second Commonwealth women enjoyed a greater degree of equality. At the festival of the "Drawing of the Water" on Sukkot women used to mingle rather freely with the men, until "a great improvement" was introduced, which consisted in the construction of a women's gallery.<sup>42</sup> According to the Tosefta a woman could be one of the seven readers required for the public reading of the Torah on the Sabbath.<sup>43</sup> But the Rabbis later discontinued this practice and ordained, "that a woman should not read publicly."<sup>44</sup> This insistence upon a more thorough segregation of the sexes at public gatherings is due to the strict standards of womanly modesty that the Rabbis imposed.<sup>45</sup> It is the concern about the possibility of undesirable conduct arising from a co-educational system, rather than the inferior position of the women, that excluded the girl from public instruction at the elementary—and secondary schools. For, as we shall presently see, the girl could privately be taught the Bible. This apprehension also barred the teaching profession to the woman.<sup>46</sup>

At about the age of six or seven years boys and girls parted company. He went to school, where he spent most of the day, while she

stayed home. There was no school for her. The place of her education was the home and the curriculum of her instruction were the domestic arts. The Mishnah gives us a picture of the domestic arts in which the girl had to be well versed as she entered into wedlock: "She grinds the flour, bakes, washes, cooks and nurses her child, makes the bed and works in wool."<sup>47</sup> The acquisition of these skills and the fact, that girls frequently married at a young age of about twelve and thirteen years, left little time for a literary education.<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, the possibility of acquiring some knowledge of the Torah was not denied to her. Indeed we do have some evidence indicating that girls did study the Bible and that women attended the lectures at the synagogue and the Bet haMidrash. But whatever they learned was done voluntarily. In the entire tannaitic literature only one voice is raised demanding that formal education for the girl be made obligatory. "Says Ben Azzai, a father is required to teach his daughter Torah."<sup>49</sup> R. Eliezer, the leading Tanna at the turn of the first century C.E., strongly objects to this opinion, without, however, registering his opposition in the form of a prohibition: "Says R. Eliezer, he who teaches his daughter Torah, teaches her licentiousness."<sup>50</sup> That the teaching of Torah was not forbidden to her is clear from this statement of the Mishnah: "But he may teach his sons and daughters the Bible."<sup>51</sup> Another indication, that there were girls who studied the Torah is the fact that the Mishnah prohibits the employment of a woman as a school teacher.<sup>52</sup> Such a law was sensible only because there must have been women who had the proper educational background to serve as teachers.

Some writers have been at pains to explain, that the attitude of parents towards their children shows a development from one of strictness in Biblical times to one of more leniency and understanding of the personality of the child in Talmudic times.<sup>53</sup> To this end they quote appropriate scriptural verses.<sup>54</sup> While of the Talmudic times one writer asserts: "In the Talmud we meet for the first time with the effort to understand the child, to awaken his interest, to win his active sympathy."<sup>55</sup> And again a few isolated references are cited to support this view.<sup>56</sup> However, the evidence presented is far too insufficient to prove either a stern parental attitude in earlier periods or a milder and more indulgent one in later times. The error made is,

that some isolated references, strewn over the many pages of the Bible and Talmud, are used to show the attitude and pattern of conduct of innumerable people who lived during many centuries. Using this method the very opposite may be demonstrated with equal ease.<sup>57</sup> Of the tannaitic period the following may be cited to imply a rather harsh attitude towards children. A special enactment at the Galilean city of Usha in the middle of the first century C.E. gave the father the right to employ ruthless means to enforce the study of the Torah by his twelve-year old son.<sup>58</sup> One Tanna held, that legally a father was not obligated to feed his children above the age of six years and only moral pressure could be brought to bear upon him to change his mind.<sup>59</sup> The Mishnah does not hold the father or the teacher responsible, if the son or pupil dies in consequence of a flogging administered to him. And R. Meir, wishing to illustrate an impending misfortune, employs an apparently familiar picture of a "teacher who comes to school with a strap in his hand. Who worries? He who usually gets chastised every day."<sup>60</sup> The Talmud relates two stories of children who committed suicide, because they were afraid of the punishment threatened by their fathers. While it is true, that these stories deal with exceptional cases of parental cruelty and children's sensitivity, they nevertheless impelled the Rabbis to issue this sound pedagogical advice: "One must not threaten a child, but either flog him immediately or keep silent and say nothing about it."<sup>61</sup>

On the basis of the available evidence it is therefore not possible to conclude, whether Jewish parents in tannaitic times generally assumed a strict and stern—or a lenient and forbearing attitude towards their children. Moreover, it is unreasonable to put this question in the "either—or" form altogether. As with parents in all times, there were those who treated their children in an affectionate and indulgent manner, while others were strict and impatient with them. The Rabbis were aware of the perennial difficulty of determining the proper way for parents to deal with their offspring; a way that should make allowance for the tender feelings of love and for the realization, that for the ultimate good of the child, it was at times unavoidable to use means of correction which he would resent quite strongly. "Said R. Simeon ben Eleazar, dealing with a woman or a child, it is best to repel with the left hand and draw near with the right hand."<sup>62</sup>

But speaking generally we may assume, that the authority of parents and the respect due to them was firmly implanted in the minds of the children. This was true of the Graeco-Roman civilization at large in whose midst Judaism flourished. It was based upon the power of parents, particularly that of the father, over the lives of the children that society accorded them. Among Jews the parental authority was enhanced by the commandment of the Decalogue to honor one's father and mother. In conclusion we may therefore say, that while the Talmudic saying: "There is no father who hates his son,"<sup>63</sup> is undoubtedly true, it is also true, that "altogether Jewish education was far from spoiling the children."<sup>64</sup>

## CHAPTER II

### ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The Torah establishes the law to educate children in these verses: "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children" (Deut. 6, 7), "Ye shall teach them to your children" (Deut. 11, 19) and "Make them known unto thy children and children's children" (Deut. 4, 9). According to tannaitic sources this duty was incumbent upon fathers and grandfathers and applied to sons and grandsons only.<sup>1</sup>

Two references that date back to the beginning of the tannaitic era, long before the elementary school made its appearance in communities outside Jerusalem, illustrates the father-son type of instruction. In the Fourth Book of Maccabees the author makes Hannah recall to her seven sons the teachings of their father: "He read to us of Abel who was slain by Cain, and of Isaac who was offered as a burnt-offering, and of Joseph in the prison . . . he glorified also Daniel in the den of lions and blessed him. And he called to your mind the words of David, the Psalmist. . . ." <sup>2</sup> And Philo informs us: "The husband seems competent to transmit knowledge of the laws to his wife, the father to his children." <sup>3</sup>

The establishment of the elementary school is a departure from the idea and practice of paternal instruction. Although the father continued to be duty bound to provide an education for his son, he no longer was required to do the actual teaching. That could be entrusted to someone else—the teacher.

Only two statements dealing directly with the establishment and development of the elementary school have come to us from Talmudic sources. One is the brief sentence: "And he, Simon b. Shetah enacted, that the children should go to school." <sup>4</sup> The other reference is in the form of an historical outline and because of its importance it will be quoted in full:

"Verily, this man is to be remembered for good, Joshua b. Gamala is his name, for were it not for him, Torah would have been forgotten in Israel. Because originally, he who had a father was taught Torah by him, but he who had no father did not learn at all.

"What did they do? They explained the verse "and you shall teach them" to mean "and you shall study them." So they ordained, that teachers of children be set up in Jerusalem in accordance with the verse: "For out of Zion shall go forth Torah, and the word of the Lord out of Jerusalem."

"But still, he who had a father was brought to Jerusalem and instructed, while he who had no father did not go up there and did not learn.

"It was therefore enacted, that they (teachers) be set up in every district and pupils be admitted at the age of sixteen and seventeen years. But then, when a teacher got angry at his pupil, he rebelled and left.

"Then came Joshua b. Gamala and enacted, that teachers of children be set up in every province and in every town<sup>5</sup> and children be admitted at the age of six or seven years."

The claim to historical accuracy of this passage may not be fully acceptable, because R. Judah, who makes this report in the name of Rab, lived some two hundred years after Joshua b. Gamala, whose educational reform is dated at about sixty-five C.E. But it unmistakably presents an outline of the course which organized elementary school education took at its early stages, a course that led from the establishment of a central school in the capital city of Jerusalem to a network of schools spread all over Jewish Palestine.

In the following pages the attempt will be made to integrate the school ordinance of Simon b. Shetah with the Baba Batra report and to properly date the three stages in the development of the elementary school system outlined in that report, the timing of which is subject to a great deal of controversy among modern writers.

The main controversy is centered upon the dating of the school reform with which Joshua b. Gamala is credited. Isaac Halevy and Aaron Hyman believe, that Simon and Joshua were contemporaries and that the educational reform for which the latter is credited was really the work of Simon, but that he used the name and prestige of the High Priest Joshua b. Gamala as a means of ensuring a more

ready acceptance of his enactment.<sup>6</sup> They base their view upon the following reading in the Talmud: "Two Dinars of gold did Martha, the daughter of Boethus, deliver to Jannai the King to appoint Joshua b. Gamala High Priest."<sup>7</sup> Since King Jannai was a brother-in-law of Simon b. Shetah, it follows that Simon and Joshua were contemporaries. They would thus advance the date for the establishment of the universal elementary school system by some 135 years to the approximate year of 70 B.C.E. and identify the ordinance of Simon b. Shetah with the third phase of the Baba Batra report. However, it seems unlikely, that King Alexander Jannaeus (103-70 B.C.E.), who as the other Hasmonaen princes was High Priest himself, should confer this high office upon someone else. It is also difficult to believe, that Simon who led the Pharisean party back to power and reorganized Jewish life should hide behind the mantle of a Sadducean High Priest.

The difficulty which the reading in the Talmud presents led I. H. Weiss to emend the text and substitute for "Jannai the King" "Agrippa the King."<sup>8</sup> Either Agrippa I (41-44 C.E.) or Agrippa II (50-100) were contemporaries of Joshua b. Gamala, who is mentioned by Josephus as one of the High Priests at the time of the Roman siege of Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup> Another explanation holds, that there were two High Priests with the name of Joshua b. Gamala.<sup>10</sup> But both solutions are arbitrary and are unsupported by further evidence.

The author proposes the following solution of the problem. The Talmud mentions a "King Jannai" as a contemporary of Jose b. Joezer.<sup>11</sup> The latter lived at the early Maccabean period and preceded Simon b. Shetah by three generations.<sup>12</sup> However, there was no ruler by the name of Jannai before Alexander Jannaeus. Why then does the Talmud speak of such a "Jannai"? The explanation appears to be the following: Since Alexander Jannaeus was the first of the Hasmonean family to rule under the title of King, the succeeding princes added the name "Jannai" to their own. The Herodian princes too, in order to enhance the legitimacy of their royalty and because of their Hasmonean background through Mariamne, the wife of Herod, adopted this name. "Jannai the King" could therefore be very well Agrippa II, who according to Josephus conferred the high priesthood upon Joshua b. Gamala.<sup>13</sup> The Talmud later no longer

differentiated between later and earlier kings and called everyone of them by the name of "Jannai the King."<sup>14</sup>

Wilhelm Bacher does not believe that it was Joshua b. Gamala who instituted this far reaching educational reform, because he was a High Priest with Sadducean leanings. He therefore proposes two corrections of the texts. Instead of Simon b. Shetah he reads Simon the Just and for Joshua b. Gamala he substitutes Joshua b. Perahiah.<sup>15</sup> This revision would advance the beginning and the development of the elementary school some two hundred years. However, Bacher's argument is not convincing to justify two emendations. From Josephus we know that Joshua b. Gamala was a man of considerable merit and well qualified to institute such an educational enactment. How strong his Sadducean leanings were, we have no way of telling. As far as the Pharisees were concerned, they surely welcomed such a legislation, even though it came from a man of supposed Sadducean leanings.<sup>16</sup>

Professor Ginzberg's assumption, that the Baba Batra report sketches "the progress made during the period of two centuries, roughly speaking, from the time of the Soferim (about three hundred before the common era) to the time of the Pharisees (about one hundred before the common era)" <sup>17</sup> cannot be reconciled at all with our text. For neither Simon nor Joshua can be placed within the period of these two hundred years.

Another opinion, that tries to harmonize the ordinance of Simon b. Shetah with the Baba Batra account, is advanced by Nathan Morris. He believes, that the two accounts supplement each other and that "the second (B.B. report) takes up the story, where it was left by the first."<sup>18</sup> This view is difficult to uphold. First, there is no mention in the Baba Batra outline of the establishment of an earlier school. Second, if such a school had been in existence, it would surely have been mentioned in that outline, for it begins with a scriptural justification to entrust the education of children to the teacher. Also his doubt as to the reliability of our report, because Joshua's reform could not have been made in "a less suitable time" is not convincing. Whether we interpret this school reform to be part of the general reorganization of Jewish life that followed the liberation of Jerusalem from the Roman siege under Cestius in the year

66 C.E., or as a measure designed to perpetuate Jewish life after the anticipated ultimate defeat of the Jews which Joshua foresaw and which ran parallel with R. Johanan b. Zakkai's effort to save "Jabneh and its scholars," his ordinance was timely.

Still another writer, Nathan Drazin, sees in the Baba Batra account an outline of the development of the three level system of Jewish education. The first phase supposedly refers to the establishment of a central academy of higher learning in Jerusalem, following the demand of the Men of the Great Assembly to "raise up many disciples" (Abot 1, 1). In the setup of the district schools for the sixteen and seventeen years old boys he recognizes the foundation of secondary high schools, which are identified with the enactment of Simon b. Shetah. Only the third phase, describing Joshua's enactment, deals with the elementary school.<sup>19</sup> While it is correct, that the Bet haMidrash preceded the Bet haSefer, there is no basis in the Baba Batra passage for the assumption of the three level system. Only one level of education is described—the elementary level. The passage begins with Joshua b. Gamala—"were it not for him Torah would have been forgotten in Israel"—and it concludes with his reform, ordaining a network of elementary schools. Furthermore, the use of the term "teachers of children" in the first phase can hardly be reconciled with teachers in "centers of higher learning." While it is true, as Drazin points out, that the term *Tinok* is occasionally used in the Talmud for older youths, the term *Melamdey Tinokot* appears only in connection with children of elementary age.

And finally, there are those who wish to identify Simon's ordinance with the second stage of the development, namely the establishment of district schools for adolescent youths.<sup>20</sup> But this opinion is not warranted in the light of the evidence. For all we know of Simon's ordinance is the brief statement, "that children should go to school." There is no mention of any set up of district schools, neither does the Hebrew expression for children "*Tinokot*" indicate the unusually late admission age of "sixteen and seventeen years."

There remains only the first phase of the Baba Batra outline, describing the foundation of central schools for children in Jerusalem, with which the enactment of Simon b. Shetah can be identified.

The Torah, as we have seen, places the responsibility and task to

educate the children upon the father. In that respect early Jewish education did not differ from the practices of other ancient civilizations.<sup>21</sup> Except for the indirect education that children acquired through participation in communal rites, their education was limited to the instruction they received in the family. With the accumulation of knowledge and the specialization of skills, the need and desire arose to train the youth more competently than the average family was able to do. Teachers were engaged and schools were opened. The two factors that contributed most to this development were the growth of the cities and the rise of the class of the wealthy. The best example is the city-state of Athens, where wealth combined with native ability to produce a remarkable civilization.

The establishment of the Jewish elementary school occurred rather late in the history of the Second Commonwealth, approximately in the year 70 B.C.E. Because the Jewish people was predominantly engaged in agriculture the growth of its urban population was a slow one and because of the vicissitudes of warfare, at times violently interrupted.<sup>22</sup>

While the urban residents made the establishment of the elementary school possible, a number of factors contributed to make the first children's school in Jerusalem an actuality. (1) The example of Greek and Roman schools, (2) the growing complexity of the teaching of the Written Law in the light of the Oral Law interpretation and (3) the reorganization of Jewish life under Pharisaic leadership.

(1) The existence of Gentile schools for children was not unknown to the Jews of Palestine. Such schools were maintained in Palestine itself, namely in those cities which had Hellenistic—or mixed populations and undoubtedly there were rich Jews, who employed private teachers to instruct their children in general knowledge. It is reasonable to assume that these foreign schools stimulated the founding of similar Jewish schools. For the advantage of public over private instruction in terms of greater economy and the saving of time to the individual father is obvious. But whatever influence the non-Jewish school exerted, the genuine need that gave rise to the *Bet haSefer* and the fundamentally different subject matter that was taught there, qualify it as a characteristic Jewish institution. A modern author underestimates the originality and strength of the Jewish way

of life, when he asserts, "that the Jews in seeking to save themselves from being overborne by the Greek culture, should have adopted the Hellenic institution of the school for their children and the Hellenic practice of disputation for their young men."<sup>23</sup> A people that lived on its own soil and that was deeply imbued with the belief in the superiority of its own way of life over all other cultures, was hardly in real danger, except through its imposition by physical force as attempted by Antiochus Epiphanes, "from being overborne by Greek culture."

(2) The content of elementary education was Mikra—the reading and understanding of the Bible, particularly that of the Pentateuch. However the "Mikra" or Bible teacher did not limit his instruction to the teaching of the literal translation of the text into the Aramaic vernacular. He would also add to it explanations in harmony with the teachings of the Oral Law. This discipline of study, supplementing, amplifying and interpreting the Written Law, had grown in the course of time into a vast accumulation of laws and halakic and agadic interpretations. The task that the Soferim and their spiritual descendants—the Pharisaic teachers, set for themselves was to impress upon the people the unity and interdependence of the Written and the Oral Law. These two branches of study could not and should not therefore be studied independent one from the other.<sup>24</sup> Whether in the Bet haMidrash or in the Bet haKeneset the method of scriptural interpretation was based upon the indivisibility of Written and Oral Law. To apply this method of instruction even on the elementary level was an assignment that surpassed the ability of the average father. It was therefore a logical conclusion to replace the teaching of the father with that of a more competent and professional teacher.

(2) The establishment of the elementary school served yet another purpose—a cultural-political one. In the struggle for leadership in Jewish life between the Pharisees and Sadducees the founding of the public school constituted an important move to assure the spread of the Pharisaic teachings among the people.

With the achievement of Jewish independence from Syrian rule, following the successful Maccabean wars, the Pharisees as the spokesmen of the common people that had borne the brunt of the fighting, enjoyed the support of the first Hasmonean rulers.<sup>25</sup> But under

Johanan Hyrcanus (135-104 B.C.E.) and Alexander Jannaeus (103-76) these relations deteriorated and finally turned into open warfare.<sup>26</sup> Hyrcanus and Alexander turned for support to the Sadducees and their party became the dominant one. Their Pharisaic opponents were ejected from positions of control in the administration, law courts and Temple organization and many of them were slain or exiled. With the death of Alexander Jannaeus and the wise and peaceful reign of his wife, Salome Alexandra (76-67), the picture was reversed. The Pharisees were recalled and under the courageous and constructive leadership of Simon b. Shetah became again the dominant party and influence in Israel. The strength of the Pharisees was vested in the popular support they received, particularly from the growing middle class which constituted the bulk of the urban population, in their liberal-democratic approach to the problems of life and in the quality of their religious-moral leadership. Their new won position they exploited to secure a wide and lasting acceptance of their teachings among the people. The enactment of Simon b. Shetah, calling for the establishment of the first children's school in Jerusalem, was an important move in this endeavor.

While realizing the need to employ competent and loyal teachers for the education of the young, the Pharisaic leaders had to reconcile this new departure with the words of the Torah that called for the father-son form of instruction. This they did by the usual means of scriptural exegesis. They found that the verse: "and you shall teach them" (Deut. 11, 19) did not cover the case of the orphan boy, who had no father to teach him. So they changed the pronunciation of the two words *Velimadetem Otam*—"and you shall teach them" into *Ul'madetem Atem*, which means "and you shall study them."<sup>27</sup> It was accordingly no longer the sole responsibility of the father to teach his son; the latter too had the duty to acquire an education. And how could the orphan boy get this education if not through the aid of someone else than the father? The elementary school seemed to be the logical answer. As soon as the principle was laid down, that children could be taught by special teachers, it was expanded to include the teaching of those boys who had fathers, but who for various reasons could not teach the Torah adequately themselves.<sup>28</sup>

It was obvious that the first school was to be established in Jeru-

saalem. It was thought of as a central school, in harmony with the verse: "For out of Zion shall go forth Torah, and the word of the Lord out of Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2, 3). The school did indeed serve not only the city population, but also accommodated out of town school boys—"he who had a father was brought to Jerusalem and was instructed." It was the first elementary school in the history of Jewish education and the praise that the Talmud bestows upon Simon b. Shetah, its founder, calling him "Restorer of the Law," was in no small measure due to the establishment of this school.<sup>29</sup>

While this plan worked well enough for the metropolis, it proved soon to be inadequate for the rest of the country. It could hardly be a solution to the out of town orphan boys—"he who had no father did not go up there and did not learn"—and even to the more fortunate boys the plan offered difficulties. There was the question of the accessibility of Jerusalem for children of young age and their accommodation in the city.

The favorable experience with the elementary school in Jerusalem and its obvious inability to solve the problem on a national basis, led to the second phase in the history of the elementary school, mentioned in the Baba Batra outline—the decentralization of the elementary school. Schools were established in the main city of each district and the age of admission was raised to sixteen and seventeen years. This plan creates the impression of an emergency measure, designed to provide at least some instruction for boys, who had no previous education. That these lads were beginners and not, as some writers want to have us believe, advanced students,<sup>30</sup> is borne out by the poor results which this enactment produced. A youth of that age could hardly be expected to submit to a school discipline that was suitable for small boys. Under these circumstances and with regard to the fact that he was old enough to take care of himself, it was not surprising that "when his teacher got angry with him he rebelled and left."

Since we do not possess additional information on this type of school, we must assume that its existence was of short duration and the accomplishments were so imperfect, that the Talmud cared little to make more mention of it. What this school did achieve was to accustom the people to the idea, that the elementary school ought to be decentralized and spread to other communities outside of Jerusalem.

The third phase in the development of the elementary school was sponsored by Joshua b. Gamala a few years before the destruction of Jerusalem. The Talmud, mindful both of the poor conditions of organized elementary education that prevailed in communities outside of Jerusalem and the great role the children's school played in the perpetuation of Jewish life, bestows lavish praise upon him: "Were it not for him, Torah would have been forgotten in Israel." Rab, to whom the Baba Batra report is attributed, wanted the Bet haSefer to share the limelight with the well publicized establishment of the academy at Jabneh by R. Johanan b. Zakkai.<sup>31</sup>

The sources do not reveal at what rate the reform of Joshua b. Gamala to set up "teachers of children in every province and in every town" was actually carried out and when the Bet haSefer became finally an accepted institution in all Jewish communities. A few inconclusive references have served as basis for a wide controversy among modern writers on the fixation of the period when the elementary school became universally adopted among the Jews of Palestine. Some believe, that Joshua's enactment indicates the existence of a universal network of such schools at the time of the capture of Jerusalem in the year seventy of the common era.<sup>32</sup> This view is difficult to uphold. Joshua b. Gamala's enactment foresees a vast educational reform and that could not have come into being as soon as its creation was ordained. Like all other human institutions it needed time and favorable circumstances to develop fully. This enactment was more in the nature of a blueprint that outlined a universal school system on the elementary level.

Another view, presented by Morris, does emphasize the process of gradual development, but dates the general adoption of the elementary school as late as the fourth century C.E. To support his assumption, he cites the story of R. Hiya, a Tanna at the end of the second century: "I plant flax, weave nets and catch gazelles. Their meat I give to orphans and of their skins I make scrolls upon which I write the Five Books of Moses. Then I go to a community that has no children's teacher and I teach five boys to read, each one a different book. . . . I tell everyone, teach your part to your friend."<sup>33</sup> This, however, proves no more than that there were some individual communities, which for one reason or another had no primary school.

The other reference that Morris cites proves even less. It is the tradition that Resh Lakish, a Palestinian Amora of the early third century, quotes: "A town that has no school for children is to be destroyed" (another version reads "excommunicated").<sup>34</sup> This tradition refers only to exceptional cases, for it is not likely, that such severe measures should be contemplated, if many communities would come under its indictment. Furthermore, the very nature of the statement implies, that the institution was well established by that time. Quoting a saying in Abot: "He who studies in childhood, what can he be likened to? To ink written on new paper. But he who studies in old age, what can he be likened to? To ink written on blotted paper,"<sup>35</sup> Morris says: "Generations after Joshua b. Gamala the Rabbis found it necessary to insist strongly on the importance of starting young."<sup>36</sup> This interpretation is untenable. First, the author of the statement in Abot is Elisha b. Abuya, who was born in Jerusalem prior to its capture and did not live "generations after Joshua b. Gamala."<sup>37</sup> And second, Elisha's saying may well be an endorsement of existing practices of "starting young," or a general contribution to educational wisdom.

The available evidence does not permit us to accept with certainty any date for the general adoption of the children's school. This author is inclined to believe, that the elementary school had become widely accepted by the time of the Bar Cochba revolt in the year 132 C.E. The reasons for this belief are the following:

Joshua b. Gamala's plan, even as that of Simon b. Shetah, was issued in the form of a "Takkanah," a legislative enactment that had to be followed. This enactment called for the assumption of communal responsibility in the education of the young and it demanded that local leadership should provide the necessary facilities to attain this end. The Takkanah was effective immediately. Only the normally slow process of accepting and establishing a new institution and the force of the disrupting interference, caused by the Roman war, delayed its fulfillment.

The setting up of these schools did not call for great effort and investments. The main expense was the tuition fee paid to the teacher, which was hardly more than the teacher needed to maintain himself and his family. The fall of Jerusalem had probably made available

enough learned men who could serve as teachers and who would be glad to find some employment. The synagogue usually provided the locale for the school and except for the scrolls of the Pentateuch there was little class room equipment.

The Talmud, trying to impress upon posterity the size of the city of Betar before its destruction in the year 135 C.E., bases its calculation upon the number of pupils who visited the elementary schools of the city.<sup>38</sup> There is no reason to assume, that the Bet haSefer was less firmly established, albeit on a lesser scale, in most other communities at the time of the Bar Cochba revolt.

The outcome of this war of independence left Judea almost depopulated of its Jewish inhabitants and transferred the center of Jewish life to Galilee. The process of reconstruction was a slow and difficult one and never regained for Palestine's Jewry its lost positions and stature. Joshua b. Gamala's idea of a general network of elementary schools once more needed years for its realization. But this idea was now firmly established and its execution proceeded side by side with the rebuilding of other time honored institutions and communal activities. While communal responsibility and control of the education of the young further developed in the post-tannaitic period, it is reasonable to maintain, that by the end of the tannaitic era organized elementary education had become a generally established practice.

The setting up of one or more elementary schools in a community did not mean that all local boys attended or were compelled to attend the school. Jewish education in tannaitic times was not compulsory in the modern sense of the term, implying state or community wide enforcement. The obligation to teach children rested upon the father. If he did not teach himself, it was his duty to provide the necessary education through other means, either by employing a private teacher or by sending his son to the elementary school. The kind of "compulsion" that was exerted and which undoubtedly was a strong one, was that of moral persuasion and social pressure. The Rabbis never tired of emphasizing the importance of organized public education, reserving for the "Tinokot Shel Bet Rabban" their highest expression of praise.

The fact that not all boys received an elementary education is indicated in the existence all through tannaitic times of the group of

Jews, called "Am haAretz." Literally translated "Am haAretz" means "People of the Land" and it referred originally to the farmer. In the course of time this name came to be applied to any Jew, who was either ignorant or negligent in the observance of the commandments.<sup>39</sup> R. Nathan b. Joseph called the one an Am haAretz, "who has a son, but does not bring them up in the knowledge of Torah."<sup>40</sup> During a famine R. Judah I opened his store houses to feed all hungry, except the Am haAretz, who could not even read the Bible.<sup>1</sup> We have no way of telling how large the group of the Am haAretz was. It would appear from the intense hostility that existed between the members of this group and the members of the learned class, that numerically it was not insignificant.<sup>42</sup> R. Johanan, the outstanding Palestinian Amora of the first generation, proposed to abandon the attitude of contempt and condemnation in dealing with the Am haAretz. The best way, he believed to bridge the gap and draw them closer to Torah, was to teach their children. And to induce people to teach these children he made this promise: "He who teaches the son of an Am haAretz the Torah will cause God to cancel an evil decree against him."<sup>43</sup>

## CHAPTER III

### THE ELEMENTARY TEACHER

Jewish education was dedicated to the faithful and accurate transmission from generation to generation of the Written- and Oral Law. This fact focuses the attention on the position and personality of the teacher. For it was his task to convey to the youth the intricate knowledge of the laws, the ideals and customs that had accumulated over the period of many hundred years and that constituted the cultural heritage of the people. In the field of secondary education the teacher's importance is illustrated by the fact, that in the absence of written texts of instruction he had to be a "living textbook." In this light we may understand R. Eliezer's remark: "I never said anything (legal opinion) that I have not heard from my teacher."<sup>1</sup> The teacher of the elementary school was more fortunate in this respect, because he taught from a written book—the Bible. But he too had to rely upon the accuracy of his memory as the text was not vocalized. In addition, he would expand the literal translation of the Bible with teachings and explanations culled from the Oral Law. We have noted above,<sup>2</sup> that following the Pharisaic party's return to power under the reign of Salome Alexandra (76-67 B.C.E.) and the beginning of the elementary school system, careful attention had to be given to the provision of competent elementary teachers, who were able to inject the teachings of the Oral Law into the study of the Bible.

In spite of the fact that the elementary teacher rendered vital service to his people our sources yield only scant and sometimes contradictory information about him. This in turn has led some modern writers to put forth un- or ill-supported conclusions on the position of the elementary teacher. The following discussion endeavors to bring greater clarity on the subject. It is arranged around this topical

treatment: (1) categories of teachers, (2) the teacher's qualification, (3) his remuneration and (4) his social status.

1. *Categories of Teachers*: The predominant name by which the elementary teacher was known in tannaitic times is "Sofer." The names "Melamed Tinokot" and "Makre Dardeke" which we often find in the Talmud were used in the main in post-tannaitic times.<sup>3</sup> Deciding against the employment of bachelor teachers, the Mishnah says: "A bachelor shall not teach as Sofer."<sup>4</sup> R. Meir, a Tanna of the second century, speaks of "the Sofer who comes to school with a strap in his hand."<sup>5</sup> With reference to the need to omit certain translations of scriptural verses during the public readings, the Tosefta continues to say: "But the Sofer teaches as he is used to."<sup>6</sup> And in the Palestinian Talmud, quoting tannaitic sources, we find the Sofer mentioned a number of times together with the "Masne" or Mishnah teacher as instructors of the youth.<sup>7</sup> Even the elementary school or Bet Sefer is called at times "Bet Sofer," for it was the Sofer who taught children the Sefer.<sup>8</sup>

Originally the title "Sofer" or "Scribe" was given to the leading scholars. In their capacity as Scribes they copied the scrolls of the Biblical books and because of their intimate knowledge of the scriptural text they became its interpreters and teachers.<sup>9</sup> Later on, as new names for the scholars evolved, such as "Hakamim" and "Rabbis," the title "Sofer" was relegated to those who wrote the scrolls of the Bible and the official documents necessary in legal transactions.<sup>10</sup> R. Joshua, a contemporary of the destruction of the Temple, sadly commented on the subsequent intellectual deterioration: "The Sages began to be like Soferim, the Soferim like students and the students like common people."<sup>11</sup>

It was only natural, that the name "Sofer" should ultimately be applied to the teacher of the Bible, even as the school in which he taught was called "Bet Sefer." Still another reason was the fact, that the professions of scribe and school teacher were often held by the same person. This was particularly true of smaller communities, which did not provide enough work for, nor had enough means to maintain a number of public functionaries. One such case is reported in the Talmud. The community of Simonias in Galilee turned to Rabbi Judah I with the request, to recommend to them a man, who

could serve as "judge, Hazzan, Bible- and Mishnah-teacher and who can attend all other needs."<sup>12</sup>

The practical arrangement of combining several functions, brought the elementary teacher also less desirable offices than those of judge and scribe. He appears at times in the capacity of "Hazzan" or synagogue attendant. As such he fulfilled a variety of duties. During the readings of the Torah he was stationed on the dais, whence he supervised the smooth functioning of the service. When no one else was available for the reading of the Torah, he would read himself. He handled the scrolls to be taken out of the ark and to be returned. And he announced the advent of the Sabbaths and festivals with trumpet blasts from the roof of the synagogue.<sup>13</sup> The fact that classes were often conducted in the synagogue, undoubtedly contributed to the utilization of the Hazzan as the teacher of children. In connection with the question, whether it is permissible to read on the Sabbath by the light of the candle, lest one adjust it unintentionally, the Hazzan appears as school teacher, as the Mishnah states: "The Hazzan may see where the children are reading."<sup>14</sup> It was not feared that the children would touch the candle, because their teacher was watching them.

In the light of the present evidence the assertion of one writer, that the Hazzan was the elementary teacher, while the Sofer was the teacher of higher education, is untenable.<sup>15</sup> Both the Sofer and the Hazzan taught primary grades. This does not mean that every Sofer or Hazzan was a professional teacher. For they could engage solely either in the business of copying scrolls and writing official documents, or in the less dignified work of a synagogue attendant. But whenever they taught, they did so as elementary teachers. The view of another writer, who distinguishes between two kinds of Hazzanim, one the master of the elementary school, who supposedly was a member of the scribes' guild and the other who was the synagogue attendant, is likewise unsupportable.<sup>16</sup> In addition to a wrong interpretation of the sources, these assumptions are heir to the desire to circumscribe exactly according to modern standards the duties of each official. Our sources are not extensive enough to permit an accurate classification of each man's task. For at one time and in one community the name "Sofer" may have been given to the local

scribe, while at other times and places it may have been the elementary teacher who bore that title and the same applies to the Hazzan.<sup>17</sup> All that we are able to do on the basis of the existing evidence, is to explain all that was meant at one time or another by these terms.

2. *The Teacher's Qualification*: Only one qualification of the elementary teacher is regulated by the law of the Mishnah—his marital status. He was not to be a bachelor, neither was a woman permitted to teach primary grades.<sup>18</sup> R. Eliezer even goes a step further and requires, that not only must the teacher be a married man, but he must actually live with his wife during the time of his employment.<sup>19</sup>

The Rabbis offered some suggestions as to the character of the teacher that seemed to them to be desirable and there are some stories in the Talmud illustrating the idealism of some teachers. But there is no set of standards which the prospective teacher had to meet in order to obtain his certification or license to teach. When Hillel said: "An irritable man cannot be a teacher,"<sup>20</sup> he did not call for an examination of the teacher's emotional stability, but rather is his statement a contribution to educational wisdom based upon his own experience and insight. Teaching of children, notwithstanding its widespread community interest and growing control, remained all during tannaitic times a private enterprise open to all aspirants.

With no capital investment necessary, beyond that of providing a room for the children and without having to graduate from a teachers training school, it was easy enough to set oneself up as school teacher. The community, it was felt, could only benefit from a multitude of teachers, as a later Rabbi put it: "The competition of elementary teachers increases wisdom."<sup>21</sup> Since his economic position, which usually was far from being an envious one, depended mainly upon individual tuition fees, the teacher was naturally interested of enrolling as many boys as possible. This in turn depended not only upon the measure of remuneration he asked for his work, but perhaps even more so upon the effectiveness of his teaching. With the great interest in the education of children the teacher realized, that the progress of his pupils could be and was readily ascertained. Under such circumstances the teacher was likely to give his best.

In order to make his students concentrate on their studies the teacher had to be a good disciplinarian. The long school hours, the lack of convenient school furniture and the scarcity of text books, together with the fact, that children of different age groups were often taught together, imposed a strain upon teacher and student. In such trying conditions only the most gifted teacher could create an educational setting which by itself was conducive to learning. The ordinary teacher had to take his recourse to the time honored rod and strap.<sup>22</sup> The Talmud takes the children's fear of the teacher for granted. In answer to the question, why school children should be allowed to read by the light of the candle on Sabbath nights, even though they might tamper with it, the Talmud says: "Children have the fear of their teacher upon them."<sup>23</sup>

The Rabbis stressed the teacher's honesty and sincerity. He was the "town's watchman" guarding the spiritual welfare of the growing youth. Upon those who were negligent in their work the verse was invoked: "Shall not all the workers of iniquity know it, who eat My people as they eat bread and call not upon the Lord" (Psalms 14, 4). On the other hand, those Bible- and Mishnah-teachers who did their work faithfully were told, that the verse: "And to him that ordereth his way aright, will I show the salvation of God" (Psalms 50, 23), was meant for them.<sup>24</sup>

In three stories the Talmud illustrates how far the devotion of the teacher to his task could and should go. The first relates the pioneering activities of R. Hiya in setting up classes of children for the study of Bible and Mishnah.<sup>25</sup> The other two stories come from the immediate post-tannaitic era and from Babylonia. But because the persons involved are close in time and outlook to the Jews of Palestine in tannaitic times, a reference to them will be helpful. Rab, a leading scholar and educator of the early third century,<sup>26</sup> often referred to a certain Samuel b. Shelath as a model teacher. Once he found him in a garden and when Rab asked him: "Have you forsaken your trust? He replied: For thirteen years have I not seen this place and even now my thoughts are with the children."<sup>27</sup> At another time Rab visited a community that suffered from a drought. He ordained a fast day. But rain did not come. Then someone of the townspeople offered the prayer for rain and rain began to fall. Rab

was greatly astonished at the efficacy of that man's prayer and he inquired of him who he was. The man replied: "I am a children's teacher and I teach poor and rich alike. He who cannot pay, I do not ask anything of him. And I have a supply of fish at hand. He who is unruly I bribe him with it, I straighten him out and I appease him until he returns to his lesson."<sup>28</sup>

3. *His Remuneration*: The question of the teacher's pay was a rather embarrassing one. On the one hand there was the ideal not to make of Torah "a spade to dig with" and derive financial benefits from spreading the word of God. But on the other hand there was the realistic view, that teachers had to be given living wages in order to attract them to the teaching profession, for "without bread there is no Torah." The compromise which the Talmud devised differentiated between elementary teaching for which the acceptance of remuneration was permissible and secondary education which should be given free of any charge.

This principle constitutes the solution of a legal case with which the Mishnah deals. A man had vowed not to extend any benefits to another man. Yet the Mishnah permits him to teach that man "Midrash, Halakot and Agadot; but he must not teach him Mikra." The reason is, that since for the teaching of Midrash, Halakah and Agada there is no charge, the teacher does not save him tuition expenses. For the teaching of Mikra, however, he does save him money, since the teacher is permitted to charge a tuition fee. The Mishnah then continues: "But he may teach his (the other man's) sons and daughters Mikra."<sup>29</sup> Again, since the teacher could be paid for teaching the Bible, the father's benefit of having his children instructed was offset by the tuition fee he had to pay for it.

The Rabbis justified this decision of accepting a remuneration for teaching the Bible upon these two grounds: (a) they created a legal fiction, saying that it was not for the teaching of the Torah for which the teacher was paid, but rather for "watching the children" to prevent them from doing mischief, or he was paid for teaching the cantillation of Bible verses.<sup>30</sup> And (b) they derived this permission from a scriptural interpretation. On the verse: 'And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and ordinances' (Deut. 4, 14), they commented, that Moses wished to convey this

idea: "Even as I do it without pay, so you too must do it without being paid."<sup>31</sup> To teach gratis, they explained, applies only to higher learning, of the type that deals with "statutes and ordinances" and not to the teaching of the Bible.<sup>32</sup>

Although the permission to charge tuition fees is advanced for the Bible teacher only, we know from a number of references in the Palestinian Talmud that Mishnah teachers too were paid for their work. The Mishnah teacher occupies an intermediate position between that of the Bible teacher and the scholar who taught more advanced courses of the Oral Law and whose students were adolescents or older. His work was still with children, about the age of ten years and above, and he is therefore mentioned a number of times in the company of the Bible teacher.<sup>33</sup> Writers on this subject generally fail to appreciate the position of the Mishnah teacher and classify him in the category as the teacher of higher education who accepted no fees for his instruction.<sup>34</sup>

All references to the Mishnah teacher's pay have come to us from Palestinian sources, while the Babylonian Talmud is silent about it. This fact may indicate a difference of practice between Palestinian- and Babylonian-Jews. It appears that the Jews of Babylonia adhered more strictly to a line of division between the teaching of the Written Law, for which the teacher could be paid and that of the Oral Law, which was to be given free. The reason for this difference may be found in the poorer economic conditions which existed in Palestine. The vast expenditures of men and resources that were thrown into the desperate revolts against Roman occupation affected deeply the economy and social outlook of the Palestinian Jews. The ideal of teaching freely the Oral Law had to give way to economic pressures.

Finally the questions need to be answered, if and to what extent the community assisted in carrying the financial burden of the school budget.

The tradition of communal responsibility in the education of children dates back to the days of Simon b. Shetah. Joshua b. Gamala's enactment called upon the local communities to employ the necessary teaching staff. To insure the success of the elementary school it was obvious that the community had to make sure, that the teachers were

paid for their work. If tuition fees, paid by the parents were insufficient or, in the case of orphans, non-existent, a communal fund would have to make up the deficit. R. Simon b. Yohai wished to stress this communal responsibility when he said: "If you have seen communities in Palestine which were uprooted from their places, know that it happened, because they did not pay the Bible and Mishnah teachers."<sup>35</sup> To help defray the costs of the elementary school a community could impose a tax for the "support of Bible and Mishnah teachers" upon residents who lived there no less than twelve months.<sup>36</sup> And R. Jose b. Nehorai advocated to bring pressure to bear upon those who were delinquent in this obligation.<sup>37</sup> It is not known, whether the teacher who was hired by the community, was paid directly by the parents at all, or whether he received his entire salary from a communal fund to which the parents were contributing in accordance with their means. The information we possess, that parents made the financial arrangements directly with the teacher, may very well refer to a private teacher, whom the parents were free to choose. The discussion of the tuition fee itself was considered important enough to take place even on the Sabbath, when ordinary business transactions were not to be discussed.<sup>38</sup>

To stimulate a more generous consideration of the elementary teacher's needs the Rabbis held out this compensating thought: "All of a man's expenditures are fixed (in heaven) between New Year and the Day of Atonement, except the expenses for the Sabbaths, festivals and the education of his children. If he spends less on these, he is granted less and if he spends more, he is granted more."<sup>39</sup>

4. *His Social Status*: In spite of the vital service the elementary teacher rendered to his people, the esteem in which he was held is far from being a universal one. He is showered with lavish praise and he is spoken of in much less complimentary terms. On the one hand the verse is applied to him: "And they that turn many to righteousness shall be as the stars forever" (Daniel 12, 13), or God himself is compared to a children's teacher.<sup>40</sup> And at other times he appears near the end of the social register. In the scale of desirable marriages the school teacher's daughter finds herself at the bottom of the list, followed only by the daughter of the Am haAretz.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, when enumerating the ten essential institutions and persons a city should

have, the elementary teacher is mentioned last—after the barber and the scribe.<sup>42</sup>

Attempts to explain this occasional derogatory attitude as a reflection of the low esteem in which the elementary teacher was held among the Greeks and Romans are of little persuasion. Expressions found in Graeco-Roman writings, such as "abominable schoolmaster," "object abhorred alike by boys and girls,"<sup>43</sup> are alien to the Jewish appreciation of the role of the children's teacher. In Greece and in Rome the elementary teacher was most often a slave. This social stigma was too strong to be balanced by his profession and it affected in turn even the status of the free teacher. But the Jewish teacher was a free-born Israelite and he shared with his fellow-Jews an idealistic attitude towards the Torah, his subject matter of instruction.

That leaves us with the problem how to account for that measure of disdain we do find in our sources.

Firstly, there was the criticism that he was "only" a children's teacher. His intellectual attainments apparently were not high enough to qualify him for the teaching of more advanced students and to be considered a scholar. Notwithstanding the importance of his work, each individual teacher came within the silent reproach, that he personally failed to ascend a higher rung on the ladder of Torah knowledge.

Neither could he claim honor and respect for the knowledge that he did possess. For there were many laymen, who were as learned and pious as he was. He did not have the prestige of having graduated from a professional training school, because such schools were unknown. Altogether there was little awareness and appreciation of the modern notion, that teaching, particularly the teaching of young children, was an art by itself, requiring much skill and wisdom. What the teacher lacked in pedagogy he would make up with the use of the strap and the drill of repetitions.

Still another reason was the fact, that he was paid for his work. Again, it was clear to all, that he had to accept tuition fees. Yet some stigma remained. He was being paid for teaching the word of God. The purity of the ideal was impaired, because the ideal was dependent upon and associated with a material gain, making it thus "a spade to dig with."

Some modern writers bestow upon the elementary teacher part of the praise, which the Talmud accords to the teacher of higher education. Their mistake is founded in the misunderstanding of the term "Rab," which is commonly translated "teacher." However the "teacher" meant by the title "Rab" is the scholar who taught mature students. It is he who is the subject of the high praise that we so often find in our sources. His more humble colleague on the elementary school level is called either Sofer, Hazzan or Melamed Tinokot.<sup>44</sup>

## *Part II*

# THE SCHOOL IN OPERATION

IV THE SCHOOL ORGANIZATION

V CURRICULUM OF INSTRUCTION

VI METHODS OF INSTRUCTION



## CHAPTER IV

### THE SCHOOL ORGANIZATION

The general interest in the education of the youth was as yet not matched by a corresponding sense of communal responsibility for its successful operation. Evidence of a growing communal share in the school program comes to us only from the post-tannaitic era. The very absence, or near absence, from tannaitic-halakic sources of rules and regulations governing the many aspects of organized elementary education, is proof in itself, that the teaching of the young was considered by and large a private affair—a matter of personal arrangement between father and teacher. The goals of education were set, their importance continuously emphasized, but it was left to the individual parties concerned, to devise the ways and means how best to achieve them.

The scarcity of material with which we have to contend continually limits our discussion on the physical aspects of the school organization to the following four areas: (1) location of school, (2) classroom equipment, (3) text books and (4) age level of pupils and school hours.

1. *Location of School*: The combination of communal interest and private responsibility in the education of the young is reflected in the choice of the facilities that were available for the location of the school. With teaching a private venture, a teacher could set up school in his own living quarters, or he could rent a room in some private building to accommodate his class there. The only limitation in the rental of such school rooms could be imposed by the residents of a joint courtyard or lane, if they did not wish to be disturbed by the noise raised by the school boys.<sup>1</sup> Later, however, this right to protest was qualified to apply only in the case of a non-Jewish school.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, there are a number of references attesting to the use of the synagogue as the locality of the Bet haSefer. The distinc-

tion that one modern writer wishes to draw between earlier and later periods as far as the use of the synagogue is concerned, asserting, that "up to about the end of the second century C.E. the elementary school was not, except in rare cases, housed in the synagogue," is not a valid one.<sup>3</sup> The Talmud, for example, informs us, that Elisha b. Albuya, who lived at the beginning of the second century C.E., visited "thirteen synagogues" to ask boys for the Biblical verses they had learned on that day.<sup>4</sup> Abba Hilkiya, a sage of the first century C.E., gave his younger son at supper time two pieces of bread, because "he had studied in the synagogue."<sup>5</sup> And the account in the Babylonian Talmud on the size of the school population in the city of Betar tells us: "400 synagogues were in the city of Betar and each had 400 children's teachers."<sup>6</sup>

Neither does his argument, that "the school appears under its own name—Bet haSefer" and that "the Synagogue is not even mentioned in connection with it," prove the separation of school and synagogue. When people spoke of the Bet haSefer they had in mind the work that was done there and not its location. Because the synagogue served a number of purposes, it was necessary to mention the elementary school that was housed there by its own name, in order to distinguish between the various functions that were held under the same roof.

The average synagogue had no elaborate accommodations to serve the needs of the school. It consisted of the main auditorium and a gallery or a partitioned space on the ground floor to seat the women.<sup>7</sup> Some also had an annex or an extra room attached to it. Such seems to have been the case in Jerusalem, of which we are told that each of its many synagogues had attached to it "a Bet Sefer and a Bet Talmud; the Bet Sefer for the study of the Bible and the Bet Talmud for the study of the Mishnah."<sup>8</sup>

Another consideration we have to be mindful of is the meaning of the term "Bet Sefer." Its literal translation as "House of the Book" is misleading, as it gives the erroneous impression of the school occupying a separate "house." "Bet" in Hebrew means more than "House of." In its widest sense it means "Place of" and it is used to precede objects which may vary in their size from an ink well to a city.<sup>9</sup> Bet Sefer accordingly means any place, where the Book

was taught, whether a special building designated only for this purpose, a single room of a private house, or the synagogue.

The synagogue was the logical place for the instruction of the young. It offered more suitable accommodations than private dwellings and its central location facilitated its accessibility.<sup>10</sup> During most of the day time no communal activities were held and the instruction of the school children could go on undisturbed. The integration of the curriculum with the content of the services conducted at the synagogue, at which the school boys were expected to participate, was another reason for the use of the synagogue. But more compelling were economic considerations. In view of the generally poor economic conditions that prevailed in Palestine under Roman occupation,<sup>11</sup> we may be sure, that an available communal facility, such as the synagogue, was fully taken advantage of to provide the locale for the instruction of the young.

To what an extent the synagogue was made available for study purposes is evident from the permission granted only to teachers and students to eat and sleep there. They could regard the synagogue as a second home, knowing that "synagogues and houses of study are for scholars and their students."<sup>12</sup>

2. *Classroom Equipment*: While there is some evidence that synagogues, particularly those of larger cities, were structures of art and prominence,<sup>13</sup> nothing comparable can be said of the accommodations the Bet haMidrash and the Bet haSefer offered to teacher and student. Two scholars, R. Hama b. Hanina and R. Hoshaiiah of the latter half of the second century, visited the Judean city of Lydda. The former commented on the beauty of the local synagogue and said: "How much money did my fathers invest here." Whereupon the other exclaimed: "How many souls did your father bury here."<sup>14</sup> The money, he felt, would have been more wisely spent in having it made possible for teachers and students to study the Torah.

There are some references in the Talmud on the way the teacher and his students were seated. From a tannaitic passage we learn, that the posture of standing was common among students of higher education up to the early part of the tannaitic era. "From the time of Moses until the time of Rabban Gamaliel Torah was studied only while standing. After the death of Rabban Gamaliel weakness

descended upon the world and Torah was studied in a sitting position.”<sup>15</sup> This posture of standing or walking about, reminiscent of the practice of Athenian schools under Plato and Aristotle,<sup>16</sup> was possible only for older students, engaged in the study of the Oral Law. But for children such a posture, sustained for a long time, would have been a physical impossibility. Moreover, unlike the students of the Oral Law, the boys of the elementary school had to be seated to be able to handle the scrolls from which they learned. The question that remains to be answered is, how were they seated?

With regard to scholars and older students the custom varied between sitting on a chair, bench or even the floor.<sup>17</sup> While we do not possess direct evidence on the way the school children were seated, we may infer from the fact, that it was common even for mature students to sit on the floor “at the feet of their teacher” and that it was considered unbecoming to be seated on a chair, couch or bench in the presence of one’s teacher, that the school boys sat on the floor.<sup>18</sup> This practice is still in vogue among school children in oriental countries. And we may also surmise, that even as it is done today, the boys set cross-legged. The following story seems to corroborate this assumption: “A man had a small son. He left him and went to the market place. The boy got up, took the scroll, put it between his knees, sat down and studied it. When his father returned from the market place he said: “Look, my little son, whom I left when I went to the market place. He got up, took the scroll, placed it between his knees and was sitting and studying it.”<sup>19</sup> Apparently the little fellow had copied the learning posture of the older boys and sat cross-legged, placing the scroll between his knees, an accomplishment that evoked the high pleasure of his proud father. The floor of the class room was either bare, or covered with a mat. In the former case some students may have spread a garment on the floor upon which they sat.<sup>20</sup>

As for the teacher, he probably had some kind of a chair. The Tosefta speaks of the “benches of the children’s teachers.”<sup>21</sup> Such a chair or bench was helpful to impress the teacher’s authority upon his pupils.

Where the size of the room or the class permitted it the children were likely to sit in the shape of a semi-circle. Such an arrangement would offer the twofold advantage of permitting the teacher to

better overlook his class and no one pupil would have his view of the teacher obstructed by some one in front of him. It would in addition constitute a miniature replica of the way the scholars and students were seated in the highest courts and academies.<sup>22</sup>

3. *Text Books*: All writers who deal with the subject of texts for the teaching of the Sacred Scriptures apparently take it for granted, that the school boys learned from the same kind of scrolls as were used for public readings in the synagogue, i.e. parchment scrolls with letters in the square Assyrian script drawn in ink. However this assumption is surrounded with a number of difficulties. First, there is the sacredness with which the Torah scroll was endowed, a belief that caused the Rabbis to warn against touching the scroll with one's bare hands.<sup>23</sup> According to the Mishnah and with reference to questions of defilement which applied only during the time of the Temple, this sanctity extended not only to the Pentateuch, but also to its constituent individual parts that had at least eighty-five letters, as well as to the other books of the canon.<sup>23</sup> The scroll was to be treated with reverence. It was, for example, irreverent to place the Torah upon one's knees and lean the knuckles of the hands upon it.<sup>24</sup> When R. Eleazar discovered that he was sitting upon a couch where a scroll of the Torah was lying, he got up as fast 'as if having been bitten by a snake.'<sup>25</sup> In the light of this it is unlikely that such sacred and in addition also bulky scrolls would and could have been used by the children of the elementary school.

Further objections against the possible use of Pentateuch scrolls in the classroom arise from the unavailability in sufficient numbers of such scrolls. With elementary education fairly general and with many large-sized classes in operation a very large number of these handwritten scrolls would have been needed. But these were not so plentiful. R. Meir once came to a community that did not possess a single scroll of Esther to be read on Purim and he was compelled to write one from memory.<sup>26</sup> R. Hiya laboriously prepared his own scrolls to teach boys in communities, which not only had no elementary teachers but which also lacked the scrolls from which to teach.<sup>27</sup> A man who permitted others to make use of his scrolls for study purposes was highly lauded. Obviously, it was not easy to procure the books from which to study. A Jew who owned a scroll of the

Torah was asked not to sell it, even if he needed the money for food. He could sell it only in order to pay for his tuition or to get married.<sup>28</sup>

Under such circumstances, it would have been logical to prepare special children's scrolls consisting of smaller portions or chapters of the Pentateuch. Such scrolls could have been more easily handled and would have required much less writing time. The Talmud indeed debates this question. Would it be permissible to discard the objection to write only parts and not the whole of the Pentateuch for the sake of classroom needs? The question was particularly urgent with regard to the writing of passages such as the Shema and the Hallel Psalms which received special attention in the curriculum of the school. Yet, the answer was — "No." However, the Rabbis left an important loophole in this prohibition, when they said: "If he (the scribe) intends in the future to add to it, it is permissible" (to write incomplete scrolls).<sup>29</sup> R. Juda, holding the minority opinion, permitted the writing of such special scrolls, containing the first five chapters of Genesis and the first eight chapters of Leviticus.<sup>30</sup> But the attitude towards writing such children's scrolls appears to have been far from unanimous. For as late as the fourth century Abaye, a Babylonian scholar raises the question again, asking his teacher: "What is the law concerning the writing of a scroll for a boy to learn from it?" The answer he received was again negative: "One does not write."<sup>31</sup>

There remains one more possibility of solving the dilemma, which under the circumstances appears to be the most likely. Namely, that the text books used in the elementary school were separate scrolls for each book of the Bible, including the Five Books of Moses. The advantage is obvious: The degree of sanctity of the individual books of the Torah, called "Humashin," is less than that attached to the entire scroll of the Law,<sup>32</sup> they were much easier to handle and their procurement easier and more economical. There are a number of references to the existence of these "Humashin" in the Talmud and since they could not be used for synagogal readings,<sup>33</sup> it stands to reason that they were used solely for study purposes. That was the way R. Hiya solved his problem of text books—he wrote five separate scrolls, teaching each to a different boy. When the enemy entered the city of Betar, the Talmud relates, the school boys were seized "and

they wrapped every one of them in his book and burned him.”<sup>34</sup> It appears unlikely, that every school boy had the use of an entire scroll of the Torah as “his book,” nor would a children’s scroll of a few chapters be large enough to serve such sad purpose. “His book” must rather be understood to refer to one of the five books of the Pentateuch.

4. *Age Level and School Hours:* A statement in Abot, made by Judah b. Tema, who probably lived at the end of the first century C.E.,<sup>35</sup> reads: “At five years he studies Mikra, at ten he studies Mishnah, at thirteen he fulfills the commandments, at fifteen he studies Talmud, at eighteen he marries. . . .”<sup>36</sup> This pronouncement is not an ordinance prescribing the correct age at which a boy is to be introduced into the various disciplines of learning, but rather a recommendation to consider these ages as the most desirable ones for the beginning of the study of Mikra, Mishnah and Talmud.<sup>37</sup>

The age of five years for the study of the Bible that Judah b. Tema proposes is in variance with the ordinance of Joshua b. Gamala which demanded, that formal instructions should begin “at the age of six or seven years.” The suitability of the latter age was later endorsed by Rab, the leading scholar of the third century.<sup>38</sup> This does not mean, however, that there were no parents who brought their children at an earlier age to school, or that the teacher who lived from the tuition fees would not accept a boy at a younger age. When Rab said to Samuel b. Shelat, an elementary teacher, “up to six years do not admit them,” he evidently intended to counteract this practice which he regarded as unwholesome, because of the heavy schedule the boy was exposed to at school.<sup>39</sup>

That boys did attend schools at an earlier age may be deduced from the fact that parents, particularly mothers, brought their little sons to school. Now if boys were not accepted at school below the age of six and seven it is difficult to see, why such boys could not make the trip to and from school by themselves; the distance involved could not have been considerable. The following reference indicates that consideration was given to make the school easily accessible to its students: Raba, a fourth century Babylonian scholar, states that “from the ordinance of Joshua b. Gamala on, one does not transfer a And a later reference tells of Jacob and Esau who up to their thir-

school boy from one community to another. But from one synagogue to another it is permissible, unless there is a river in between that is without a good bridge.' <sup>40</sup>

How closely Juda b. Tema's recommendation regarding the proper age for the study of the Mishnah was followed, we are unable to ascertain. That really would depend upon two factors: the age of the boy when he entered school and his ability to master the subjects of study. But when he says "at ten years he studies the Mishnah," we may take it that on the average about five years were required for the study of the Bible. A later scholar considered four years to be the normal period of time to cover the same ground. He quoted the advice of his mother, that the respective ages for the beginning of the study of the Bible and the Mishnah should be six and ten years.<sup>41</sup>

Even less uniformity prevailed with regard to the time when the pupils would discontinue their school education. Not all who entered the Bet Sefer continued to study the Mishnah, and not all who commenced the study of the Mishnah completed the five years' course. The following post-tannaitic source, although it must not be taken literally, may shed some light on the numerical proportion between the students of Bible, Mishnah and Talmud: "As it usually occurs, one thousand people study the Bible, but only one hundred complete it. One hundred study the Mishnah, but only ten complete it. Ten study the Talmud, but only one reaches the degree of rabbinical ordination."<sup>42</sup> The discrepancy between the numbers of Bible and Mishnah students on the school level was apparently not so large. For there are a few indications pointing to the age of thirteen, when in many cases formal education came to an end. At a synod at Usha, a Galilean city, it was ordained "that a man should bear leniently with his son up to his twelfth year, from then on he should treat him with sternness."<sup>43</sup> This ordinance becomes clear when we bear in mind, that at the age of twelve the boy began his last year before he became a Bar Mitzvah, in duty bound to fulfill all the commandments upon the adult Jew. The Rabbis insisted that at least during this year every effort should be made to compel the boy to learn the lore and practice the Mitzvot of the Torah. "Said R. Eleazar, a man must busy himself with his son for thirteen years. Thereafter he should say: Blessed be He who had freed me of this responsibility."<sup>44</sup>

And a later reference tells of Jacob and Esau who up to their thirteenth year attended the Bet haSefer. After thirteen years one went to the houses of study and the other to the houses of idolatry."<sup>45</sup>

It appears that in most cases the formal education of the boy came to an end at about this time, because of the following considerations. First, according to the Boraita, the father had discharged his duty to teach his son Torah by teaching him the Pentateuch only and that was accomplished about the age of ten years.<sup>46</sup> Then there was the economic factor. With all their love of Torah most parents were not in such favorable financial circumstances that permitted them to send their sons for a much longer period of time to school. As long as the boy studied at school he was an expensive liability, but once apprenticed to learn a trade he eventually became a financial asset. And to teach his son a trade was a paternal duty, even as the teaching of Torah. "A father is obligated to circumsize his son, to redeem him, to teach him Torah, to teach him a trade and to marry him off."<sup>47</sup> Those boys who did go on with their studies to acquire a higher education were either the sons of the rich, or the gifted ones for whose maintenance the parents would exert themselves to the utmost, or for whom some communal support would be made available.

*School Free Days:* The modern notion that both teachers and pupils need periodic vacations from school work for purposes of relaxation and recreation was unknown in tannaitic times. The same held true of the Greek and Roman schools. Only the holidays provided a welcome interruption from the daily labor of teaching and learning. But even such vacations the Jewish boys did not enjoy as often as did the Greek and Roman boys, whose calendar was filled with a greater number of religious and state festivals.<sup>48</sup> It was only natural for people who believed, that "Jerusalem was destroyed, because school children had been interrupted from their studies" and "that the world depends upon the breath of school children," or that "school children must not be interrupted from their studies even for the purpose of rebuilding the Temple,"<sup>49</sup> would dedicate their children to the most intensive form of education.

On the Sabbath the learning schedule was considerably eased. No new subjects were studied, only that which had been learned during the week was reviewed.<sup>50</sup> On Friday nights the boys would go

over the portion of the Scriptures that was read in the synagogue on the morrow. This they would do either by themselves, or under the supervision of their teacher.<sup>51</sup> To demand more, it was felt, was not compatible with the spirit of home enjoyment, restfulness and the effect of better food that marked the Sabbath day and that was little conducive to mental exertions.<sup>52</sup>

We have no information on the way the school children fared on the major festivals of calandar year. But it does not appear that classes were held on these days or on the afternoons preceding each holiday. Before the destruction of the Temple there was even less likelihood that schools were in operation on Passover, Shavuot and the Feast of Tabernacles. For then every male Jew, except infants,<sup>53</sup> was required to "appear before the Lord" and make his pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem.

After the destruction of the Temple the school boys gained another day and a half of vacation. That was on the ninth day of Ab, the date commemorating this destruction. Since the study of Torah was considered a joyous matter it was dispensed with on that day.<sup>54</sup> With regard to the three weeks prior to the Ninth of Ab, during which some measure of mourning had to be observed, we have a post-tannaitic source that tells how a Rabbi instructed the Bible and Mishnah teachers to dismiss the boys from school after the fourth hour of the day.<sup>55</sup> The fact that this dispensation was made, indicates that previously such a practice was not prevalent, at least not on a widespread scale.

One modern writer is rather generous with the number of school-free days which he believes the pupils of the elementary school enjoyed. Supposedly they had vacations "on days preceding the Sabbaths, feasts, holy days and fast days . . . the three days preceding Shavuot, on the half-days of Hanukah, on New Moon and on the Fifteenth of Ab and Shebat."<sup>56</sup> All this of course, in addition to the school-free days of the holy days themselves. However, since for most of the days enumerated by the author no support is found in the sources, the major part of his assertion must be dismissed as being unfounded.<sup>57</sup>

As in the schools of Greece, classes began early in the morning and lasted throughout the day.<sup>58</sup> Rab was asked whether village

children, who attended school in town, would be safe from evil spirits in the darkness of the night before daybreak on their way to school and in the evening on their way home.<sup>59</sup> And one scholar explained his haste in bringing his son to school early in the morning by referring to the revelation on Sinai, for which Moses had led the people early in the morning to the mount.<sup>60</sup>

It is a moot question, whether the children had their lunch at the school, went home for it, or studied all day without eating lunch. One modern writer believes: "that no lunch hour was provided for the children."<sup>61</sup> But the evidence he cites is far from sufficient to prove his assumption. The story of Abba Hilkiya of the first century C.E., who gave to his younger son an extra piece of bread, because he, unlike his brother, had spent the day in school, cannot possibly describe conditions of lunch practices over hundreds of years in many places. His other proof, which is based upon a question raised in post-tannaitic times, whether synagogues and Houses of Study need to be searched for bread crumbs on the eve of Passover, is of greater weight. But here too we must beware of over-generalizations. R. Jeremiah, it is true, assumes in his questions, that no food was brought into the Bet haKeneset and the Bet haMidrash. Yet again, this may have been the case only in his own time or in his particular vicinity. For another and older source in the Palestinian Talmud declares that the "synagogues and Houses of Study are for scholars and their students," in which they were permitted to eat and to sleep.<sup>62</sup>

Although the night was a favorite time for studying the Torah, children were not required to study at school in the evening hours. Only on Friday nights do we find school boys studying in an organized fashion.<sup>63</sup> But this reference does not make it clear, whether these boys were pupils of the Bible school or whether they were older pupils, who studied the scriptural reading of the Sabbath. The older students who attended the Mishnah classes were indeed expected to study in the evening too. Quoting the verse: "And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights" (Exodus 34, 28), the Rabbis ordained, "that the Mishnah teachers should teach mornings and evenings."<sup>64</sup> But how long such evening lessons lasted we have no way of telling.

## CHAPTER V

### CURRICULUM OF INSTRUCTION

1. *Pre-School Education*: The father's duty to train his son aimed at the ideal of Torah and Mitzvot, which could be realized only through learning and doing. This duty began as soon as the child was in the position to learn by repeating words and sentences and by doing simple religious rites. Long before the boy reached the age when formal instruction at school began the father was required to introduce his son into the religious life of his people. Realizing that at that age the little boy was most apt to learn things by doing rather than by memorizing mechanically, the Rabbis differentiated in their demands of the father between training his son in the practice of Mitzvot and teaching him whatever Torah knowledge he could grasp. The first demand they put in the form of a law—"a minor who knows how to shake the Lulab is obligated to do it, to put on the fringers—is obligated to do it."<sup>1</sup> The other demand they put before the father in the form of a recommendation, albeit a strong one. They told the father that he "should teach him the Shema and Torah and the sacred tongue, and if not, it would have been better had he (the boy) not been born."<sup>2</sup>

How much the little boy actually learned before he went to school depended of course upon his native ability and the amount of time his father and oftentimes his mother would spend in teaching him. The sources do not tell us what knowledge on the average a boy ought to have had when he entered school. They are explicit only with regard to two verses from the Torah that the little boy had to know orally: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deut. 6, 4) and "Moses commanded us the Torah, it is an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob" (Deut. 33, 4).<sup>3</sup> This knowledge was considered the minimum and it could be mastered in a few months. It stands to reason that this was not the only thing he learned during

the three or four years before he reached school. We rather surmise with Maimonides, that the father "taught him little by little, verse after verse until he was about six or seven years old, all in accordance with his strength, whereupon he led him to the school teacher."<sup>4</sup> Thus the father would teach him gradually the rest of the chapter of Shema, which was recited every morning and evening. As he would put on the fringes, shake the Lulab, eat and drink he learned to say the required benedictions. And as his parents took him to the synagogue, he would learn to recite and chant parts of the liturgy.

The recommendation to speak to the little boy in Hebrew is evident of the esteem in which the "sacred tongue" was held. For the vernacular of the people was Aramaic and not Hebrew. But how much Hebrew the Rabbis expected the average father to know and how much he should use it in talking to his little son we do not know. This question is part of the larger problem to what extent Hebrew was a living tongue during the time of the Second Commonwealth and the tannaitic era.<sup>5</sup> We find no indication, that the Rabbis urged or stressed the teaching of Hebrew as a spoken language to be part of the curriculum of either the elementary school or the academies of higher learning.<sup>6</sup> Altogether we find only two voices raised towards the end of the tannaitic period calling for a greater use of Hebrew by the people. "Said R. Meir: He who lives in Palestine and recites mornings and evenings the Shema and converses in the sacred tongue, is sure to have a share in the world to come."<sup>7</sup> R. Judah I, who was anxious to revive the use of Hebrew and in whose house even a servant could qualify as an expert in that language,<sup>8</sup> once stated, that "in Palestine only the sacred tongue or Greek should be spoken."<sup>9</sup>

It appears, therefore, that the Hebrew conversation between the father and his little son did not proceed far beyond the "token stage." It was an expression of piety to dedicate the first words of the child, whose very breath was held to be pure, to the holy tongue. Whatever ability to express himself in Hebrew the boy would eventually acquire was a concomitant gain, resulting from his study of the Bible, listening to and pronouncing the Hebrew version of the oral laws and reciting the Hebrew prayers of the liturgy.

2. *The Aleph-Bet*: The formal education of the boy at school began with the teaching of the Aleph Bet, the Hebrew alphabet.

There are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet, five of which are written differently when they appear at the end of a word. These the boy had to learn by name, sound, order and perhaps also by their numerical value. Much care was given to this phase of instruction. The teacher would make the children study the aleph-bet in various orders, either in the regular order—from the aleph to taw, or in the reverse order, or in any other way that he would devise. The Talmud tells how Hillel taught a pagan, who wished to become a Jew, the letters of the aleph-bet. Apparently he proceeded in the same manner as the elementary teacher, when “on the first day he taught him aleph, bet, gimel, dalet and on the second day he reversed the order.”<sup>10</sup>

The teacher would draw the letters upon a tablet, which each pupil had for this purpose and point out the name and letter-sound of each consonant. When R. Akiba decided to become a student of the Torah, he and his little son, according to an account in Abot of R. Nathan, “went and sat before a children’s teacher. He (R. Akiba) said to him: ‘my teacher, teach me the Torah.’ Then R. Akiba held one end of the tablet and his son the other end. He (the teacher) wrote for him the aleph bet and he learned it; aleph taw and he learned it. Then he went, sat down for himself and said: ‘why was this aleph written, why was this bet written’.”<sup>11</sup>

The teacher, as it appears, gave each child special attention. He wrote the letters upon the boy’s tablet and taught him their names. The boy would then practice the reading of the aleph bet by himself, while the teacher attended in the same manner to another pupil. This procedure is reminiscent of the way the Greek boy learned to write the alphabet. He, too, had a tablet, upon which “the writing master first draws lines with a stylus for the use of the young learner, he then gives him the tablet and makes him follow the lines.”<sup>12</sup>

Particular care had to be given to the correct pronunciation of each letter and later on of each word. For the goal was the student’s eventual ability to read publicly from the Torah in the synagogue. Such reading, in order to be valid for reader and listener, had to be recited correctly. The letters which one was more likely to confuse and mispronounce were the aleph and the ayin and the he and bet, because of similarity of pronunciation and appearance. A Boraita

tells us, that because they confused these letters, "the people of Bet Shan (Skypthopolis), Bet Haifa and Tib'onim were not permitted to act as readers of the service."<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the Judeans were recognized as the experts in correct pronunciation and their ruling was accepted in doubtful cases.<sup>14</sup>

3. *Mikra*: Following his mastery of the Aleph Bet the boy advanced to the study of Mikra, the Pentateuch. It appears from a number of indications, that there was no uniform pattern concerning the part of the Pentateuch with which the children began their instruction. Two considerations, one a practical-liturgical and the other a sentimental-pietistic, stood in the way of commencing the instruction at the logical start—Genesis. The first consideration proposed, that the boy should begin his studies of the Bible with the reading of the Shema (Deut. 6, 4-9. 11, 13-21. Num. 15, 37-41), and the Hallel (Psalms 113-118). These two selections constituted important parts of the liturgy and were recited either publicly at the synagogue or privately at home. Learning to read them, he would learn to know them by heart and would thus be in the position to more fully participate in the services. With regard to the Shema he would sooner be able to recite it each morning and evening, as the law required the Jew to do.<sup>15</sup>

That this practice was widespread is evident from the halakic discussion, whether it is permissible to write the Shema and Hallel on special scrolls for the use of school children.<sup>16</sup> Even though the question was negatively answered the prohibition could still be circumvented. For the scribe was permitted to write such scrolls, if he had the intention of expanding them later into a complete book of the Bible or into the whole Pentateuch.<sup>17</sup> A later source takes the use of such special scrolls for the instruction of children for granted: "How does a person study the Torah? One tells him first to read the scroll, then the book, then the Prophets and then the Scriptures. After completing Mikra he studies the Talmud, then the Halakot and then the Agadot."<sup>18</sup>

Another practice was to begin the instruction of the Bible with Leviticus. The reason for it is advanced in the third century C.E., but it bears upon a custom that had taken hold much earlier. "Said R. Assi: why do children begin their studies with the Levitical Code

and not with Genesis? The reason is, children are pure and the sacrifices are pure. Let those who are pure come and busy themselves with the study of that which is pure." <sup>19</sup> That this practice was followed in earlier days is indicated in the previously mentioned tannatic discussion, where R. Judah permits the edition of special children's scrolls consisting of the first five chapters of Genesis and the first eight chapters of Leviticus.<sup>20</sup> And, we remember, when R. Akiba began to study Torah, he turned immediately to Leviticus after he had mastered the Aleph Bet.<sup>21</sup>

From an educational point of view this custom cannot be defended. The Levitical laws are much too complicated for the beginner. Besides, with the destruction of the Temple the laws of sacrifice retained merely an academic value. What then is the reason for this strange practice?

Bacher contends that it was the continuation of a custom followed in schools for priestly children in Jerusalem, to whom the book of Leviticus would be of particular importance.<sup>22</sup> This view is difficult to accept. The priestly children would learn the other books of the Pentateuch too. Then why should they be exposed to the pedagogical disadvantage of having to begin their studies with Leviticus at such early age? Secondly, it is extremely unlikely, that the supposed practice of priestly schools should have impressed itself upon all other schools, including those that flourished after the disappearance of the priestly service, to the point where the logical start of the instruction—Genesis—should have given way to an illogical beginning.

In the opinion of this author the practice to begin the study of the Bible with Leviticus is based upon nationalistic-religious sentiments that crystallized in the era following the destruction of Temple and state. The leaders of Jewish life were anxious to lead the people away from despair and resignation by holding out to them the promise of future glory. The Temple would be rebuilt and the priestly service reinstituted. In the meantime the attachment to Israel's past eminence had to be kept alive. To that end they introduced several customs designed to impress the memory of the Temple upon the people, like R. Johanan b. Zakkai's ordinance to repeat the service of the Lulab for seven days, as it was done in the Temple, or the

custom to eat on the Seder night unleavened bread together with herbs "in memory of Hillel at the time of the Temple."<sup>23</sup> One other such custom was the practice to let the school boys begin the study of the Pentateuch with Leviticus, the Priestly Code."<sup>23</sup> And since this was meant merely as an expression of faith, it was not necessary to study the book of Leviticus till its end and thus unduly tax the learning capacity of the student. The purpose was well served by studying only the first part. Hence R. Judah's permission to edit special children's scrolls containing only the first eight chapters of Leviticus. Thereafter the boy would return to Genesis and study the Torah in the proper order. Many years later, after the people had long made its adjustment to existing conditions, this custom had lost its original urgency. But because it was so well established it was continued and R. Assi advanced another reason to justify its perpetuation.

The school boys learned the Bible without omitting any part of it, either in reading or translating. The Tosefta states, that unlike the public reading, where certain embarrassing passages were not translated into the vernacular, "the teacher teaches without omission."<sup>25</sup> As the students advanced the teacher would add to the regular lesson those portions of the Pentateuch and the Prophets that were read publicly on the Sabbaths and festivals. This served a two-fold purpose, namely the boy would be prepared to follow the Torah reading during the service and it would encourage him to read himself or translate before the adult congregation. That privilege he was (clearly) given by the law: "A minor may read and translate the Torah."<sup>26</sup> That this was not too great an accomplishment is evident from the following consideration: The Pentateuch has 5845 verses, which in Palestine were read during a triennial cycle,<sup>27</sup> i.e., about 35-40 verses per Sabbath. These in turn were divided among seven readers, so that each individual reader read some five or six verses on the average.

The subject matter of Mikra comprised all the twenty-four books of the Hebrew Canon.<sup>28</sup> This is attested to by the wide range of answers given by school boys to the question, which adults often used to ask of them: "Tell me your verse" and which referred to a verse they had learned on that particular day. Among such answers given

the Talmud quotes I - II Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremeiah, Ezekiel, Malachi and Psalms.<sup>29</sup> However, the main attention was given to the study of the Five Books of Moses. Indeed the very term "Mikra," used in this discussion for Bible, was employed interchangeably to denote either Bible or Pentateuch.<sup>30</sup>

Reading the Bible was taught together with its translation. As the children mastered the mechanics of reading the text, more attention was paid to the comprehension of what was read. The Bible was translated into the Aramaic language, which was the vernacular of the people. Even though there were other languages spoken too, such as Greek and Syriac,<sup>31</sup> the common vehicle of communication was Aramaic. Indeed the Hebrew word for translation—"Targum" was identified with Aramaic. Neither was Hebrew used as the language of instruction. Since the primary objective was comprehension, the most direct means was used to attain it—the vernacular. The Rabbis did not let the national and even religious value of Hebrew outweigh their concern to make sure, that every Jew should understand the meaning of what the language had to convey. For that reason they permitted the writing of the Torah in foreign languages for Jews who did not know Hebrew. Or the permission to recite the Shema mornings and evenings "in any language they understand." <sup>32</sup>

The translation taught was not always a literal one. To some extent it was in the nature of an explanation and interpretation. For the desired aim in the translation of the text was twofold. The pupil should come to know both the exact meaning of each word as well as its authoritative explanation, wherever this explanation differed from the literal meaning. This was achieved progressively. As he met the same word in various contexts its literal meaning would become fixed in his mind. Such importance was attached to this Bible translation or Targum, that it was considered a separate branch of study forming the bridge between Mikra and Mishnah.<sup>33</sup> For the use in the elementary school the Targum had to be brief and cling closely to the words of the verse they were supposed to translate.

4. *Liturgy*: According to the Mishnah "minors are obligated to say the T'filah (Eighteen Benedictions) and recite the grace after meals." <sup>34</sup> To comply with this demand was no mean accomplishment

even for an adult, for the liturgy in tannaitic times was still in a stage of development and flux. The general objection against committing oral laws to writing applied also to liturgy, a fact that added more difficulty to its correct rendition.<sup>35</sup> The teaching of the liturgy occupied therefore an important place in the school curriculum. The close relationship between school and synagogue could not but stimulate the attention given to this part of instruction. In many instances the school was located in the synagogue. This quite naturally led to a participation in the daily communal services by the school children under the close supervision of their teacher.

Two of the most important parts of the liturgy were familiar to the pupils from their pre-school parental instruction and from their studies of the Bible—the Shema and the Hallel. But being minors they were not permitted to lead the congregation in their recitation. This was in contrast with the practice to let young boys read publicly from the Torah which included the Shema. The reason was, that the Shema and the Hallel were recited orally and in a responsive fashion and such responsibility the Rabbis did not entrust to minors.<sup>36</sup> The same prohibition applied to other liturgical recitations, such as the T'fillah and the priestly benediction.<sup>37</sup>

The following illuminating reference offers a clue on the way the Hallel was learned at school and how it was recited in the synagogue. R. Akiba, wishing to illustrate the way Moses and the people had sung the song at the Red Sea, said, that it was recited in the same fashion as "the minor who reads the Hallel in the Bet haSefer and the others repeat after him every sentence. R. Jose the Gallilean says: as the man who reads the Hallel in the synagogue and the others repeat after him the first part of each sentence."<sup>38</sup> The teaching of the Hallel accordingly proceeded in the following manner. The teacher would recite a sentence and then make the class repeat it. As soon as the pupils were able to read or recite the sentence by themselves, the teacher called on individual boys to lead in similar fashion the responsive reading of the group. But while the congregation in the synagogue would, according to R. Jose, repeat only the first part of each sentence, the boys in the Bet haSefer repeated the whole sentence, so that ultimately they should be able to act as leaders of the Hallel service in the synagogue.

5. *The Problem of Writing*: Some of the controversy among modern writers on the subject of the teaching of writing at the school is due to the following reasons: (a) the mistake of applying the Greek and modern notion that regards writing as an art by itself to the Jewish scene and (b) the "either—or" attitude, that seeks to answer the problem either positively or negatively, disregarding a middle solution, namely that writing may have been taught in some schools and in some periods but not in others.

That the Jews did have an appreciation of the beauty of literary style is evident from the Biblical writings. Their close study could not fail to arouse this sense of appreciation. But there were a number of taboos in the way of letting this recognition blossom into creative literary activity. Foremost of these was the belief that no more books could be added to the sacred writings after their canonization. It is true, that following the conclusion of the canon there came into being a group of historical and religious writings, the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, which even in the translation in which they are known to us reveal beauty of form and content. But instead of stimulating literary activity these books eventually accomplished the very opposite. For in the eyes of the Rabbis, living as they did in times that were rife with various gnostic teachings, theosophic speculations and Christian doctrines, many of these writings with their strong messianic undercurrents and eschatological mysticism, constituted a real threat to the purity of Pharisaic Judaism. They stigmatized these books therefore, calling them "outside books and prohibited their reading."<sup>39</sup>

More discouragement against writing came from the previously mentioned reluctance to record any oral teachings in writing, despite the great relief from the heavy demands made upon memory this would have brought.

On the other hand there were the innumerable occasions when writing was required, like the writing of scrolls, documents, inscriptions, letters, signatures, business entries, etc., of which there is abundant evidence in the entire Talmudic literature. A correspondingly large amount of attention is given to the tools and materials of writing.<sup>40</sup> All of this points to the assumption that writing was widespread among all classes of the people.<sup>41</sup>

The only direct reference that writing was taught in the elementary school is contained in the account of R. Simeon b. Gamaliel. Speaking of the size of the schools in Betar and the readiness of the school boys to defend themselves against the Roman soldiers, he quotes them as saying: "If the enemies will come upon us we will go against them with these writing pens and pierce their eyes." <sup>42</sup> Other sources, too, inform us, that children learned to write, but whether they were trained at school or privately we are not told. The Tosefta, wishing to illustrate a legal point concerning the writing on the Sabbath, speaks of "the minor who holds the Kalamus (pen-rod) and the grown up leads his hand and he writes." <sup>43</sup> Two sources coming to us from the end of the third century may still be helpful for our purpose, as there is no reason to believe, that much changed with regard to the teaching of writing during the intervening centuries. R. Helbo explains, that the letters of the Ten Commandments inscribed themselves at the behest of God, "as the student who writes and the teacher orders him aright." This writing lesson is more advanced, as the teacher no longer guides the hand of the pupil, but supervises his choice of letters to make up the desired word. Another Midrash tells of a "king who once passed a market place and said: get me this ink and this Kalamus for my son." <sup>44</sup> When we bear in mind, that the Midrash for reasons of effectiveness uses popular illustrations, we will appreciate the fact, that the "ink and the Kalamus" for the study of writing by the children was a familiar sight to the listeners and readers of the Midrash. Going back to earlier times we find the discussion on the validity of a scroll for public reading that was written by a minor. <sup>45</sup>

On the basis of the available source-material we cannot subscribe to the judgment of a modern scholar, that "the writing and reading of the Hebrew script was quite naturally taught in the school." <sup>46</sup> And we are much less ready to admit with another modern writer, "that the elementary school itself in that period did not as a rule teach writing to its pupils." <sup>47</sup> All that can be said is, that the rudiments of writing, i.e. the drawing of the Hebrew letters was taught in many schools during the tannaitic period. Writing as an art in itself, as it was taught in Greek schools, had no place in the Jewish elementary school.

6. *The Study of Greek and Secular Subjects:* A glance at the map will suffice to make one appreciate Palestine's geographical position as the heart of the Middle East. Because of it, this small land was of great interest to the surrounding empires as they struggled for the domination of the ancient world. In the wake of their armies and administrations foreign cultures invaded Palestine and challenged the native spirit of Judaism. That it survived this impact is a testimony to the strength of its own way of life.

Foremost among these foreign influences was the spirit of Hellenism. One way in which the leaders of Jewish life tried to counteract these influences was by banning them from the school program both on the elementary and the secondary level. The extensive use of Greek and Latin terms in the Talmudic and Midrashic literature does not prove that these languages were taught at school. These words became part of the vocabulary of the Rabbis and the people in the course of political, economic and social relations the Jews had with their non-Jewish neighbors inside and outside of Palestine. Greek was a cosmopolitan language, known to the upper classes of all the people of the Mediterranean world including the Jewish people.<sup>40</sup>

While some of the Rabbis had a certain fondness and admiration for the Greek language, the Rabbis as a whole opposed what they called "Greek wisdom," that is Greek philosophy and literature.<sup>49</sup> However even here they had to make one important concession. On the explanation of the Talmud, that the Mishnaic verdict against the teaching of Greek applies only to Greek wisdom,<sup>50</sup> the Gemara asks the question, did not R. Simeon b. Gamaliel say "there were a thousand children at my father's house. Five hundred of them studied the Torah and five hundred studied Greek wisdom."<sup>51</sup> To this the Talmud in the name of an old tradition gives the following answer: "The House of Rabban Gamaliel is different, it is close to the government."<sup>52</sup> Where important public relations were involved concessions were made and the permission was given to study "Greek wisdom," so that Jewish representatives could move more freely in high non-Jewish circles.

The study of the Greek language, though free of rabbinical prohibitions, was limited to those who had need of it and who were in the position to pay the tuition fee. This applied mostly to the upper

classes only who, because of their political and commercial ties with non-Jews in Palestine and outside of it and with Greek-speaking Jews of the diaspora, employed teachers to instruct their children in the knowledge of Greek and possibly also of Latin. But in the popular Bet haSefer Greek was not taught, even as it did not replace Aramaic as the vernacular of the people.<sup>53</sup> After the destruction of Jerusalem and more so after the catastrophic outcome of the Bar Cochba revolt against the Romans the study of Greek was greatly reduced. This was due to the impoverishment of the population, the growing spirit of suspicion and hostility to foreign cultures and the rising insistence upon an exclusive Torah education. A characteristic reply was given by a leading scholar at the turn of the first century to a question, whether it was permissible to teach one's son Greek. R. Joshua replied: "Let them teach it at an hour that is neither day nor night, for it is written: thou shalt meditate therein day and night" (Joshua 1, 8). The same answer was given by another Tanna, R. Ishmael, who was asked by his nephew: "I have learned the whole Torah, may I now study Greek wisdom?"<sup>54</sup>

Eventually the Rabbis decided against the teaching of Greek altogether. In a Mishnah we read: "In the war against Vespasian they prohibited the use of crowns for bridegrooms and of tambourines. In the war against Titus they prohibited the use of crowns for brides and that a father should teach his son Greek. In the last war they prohibited, that a bride should walk publicly under a canopy."<sup>55</sup> In the opinion of this author, the date of the prohibition of the teaching of Greek is the year 117 C.E. and is the result of the bloody suppression of the Jewish uprisings against the Roman rule in various parts of the Middle East in the time of Emperor Trajan. The bitter fights revealed the intense animosity of the local Greek-speaking populations towards the Jews, who in turn reacted to this experience by banning the instruction in Greek. To arrive at this date a slight emendation in the text of the Mishnah will have to be made, namely to substitute the word "Quietus" for "Titus." This emendation appears necessary for the following reasons: It is difficult to assume, that the Mishnah should believe the "war against Titus" to be the second conflict. For Titus led the same war as his father Vespasian at 67-70 C.E., although there was an interval of fighting between the two high com-

mands. From previously cited evidence it is clear, that after the "war against Titus" the ban of teaching Greek was not yet known and people asked the Rabbis about its permissibility. Besides, it may be asked, why should the uprisings under Trajan in 117 C.E., which according to contemporary Roman sources were of great magnitude and ferocity, not have elicited a similar commemoration as the other two struggles did? The Talmud itself, commenting on this Mishnah, seems to have been confused as to the date of the prohibition and predates it to the time of the civil war between Hyrcanus and Aristobulus at 63 B.C.E.<sup>56</sup> The emendation of the text in the Mishnah is indeed a slight one, involving merely the substitution of the letter K for T. Our source would then refer to the "war against Quietus," a Roman general, who was sent at the close of the rule of Trajan to suppress the Jewish revolts. A parallel Mishnah of the Palestinian Talmud indeed reads: "in the war against Quietus."<sup>57</sup> The Seder Olam, a tannaitic chronicle, also mentions the struggle against Quietus as one of the three great conflicts with Rome; "From the struggle against Vespasian until the struggle against Quietus passed fifty-two years and from the struggle against Quietus until the struggle against Ben Cozeba (Bar Cochba) passed sixteen years."<sup>58</sup>

The teaching of secular subjects, such as geography, arithmetic and natural sciences, though not a threat to the purity of Judaism as "Greek wisdom" was not part of the curriculum of the elementary school. Even the permission to employ a Cuthean, who was not considered a full Jew, as children's teacher, did not carry with it the implication, that he taught secular subjects. According to a Boraita "one may hand over to them a boy to teach him the Sefer and to teach him a trade."<sup>59</sup> No other subject is mentioned.

Yet indirectly, in the course of the study of the Bible, the boy would acquire a fair amount of general knowledge. In view of the limited fund of knowledge that was known and available to the general public at that time, this concomitant secular knowledge was not insignificant. He would for example, learn a good deal of history and the study of the boundaries of the land and its division among the twelve tribes would acquaint him with the location of the surrounding countries and the geography of his homeland. The measurements of Tabernacle and Temple and the chronology of Jewish kings

which he found in the Bible, as well as the laws of the walking distances on the Sabbath and those of planting and sowing of which many boys would get a practical knowledge, taught him some arithmetic and geometry. And the study of the dietary laws would give him some knowledge of physiology and anatomy.

But whatever degree of appreciation and interest secular knowledge elicited was bound up with its practical value, either in pursuance of a trade and profession or in its helpfulness to better understand and apply the laws of the Torah. The claim of knowledge for its own sake, Jewish education accepted only for the study of Torah.

## CHAPTER VI

### METHODS OF INSTRUCTION

The few occasional glimpses of the pedagogical principles held and the methods of instruction used that our sources permit us to have, do not combine into a clear and comprehensive view of the way the children were taught. On this subject our information is even more limited than on the other phases of our topic.

The Jewish elementary school was entirely curriculum-centered. Modern notions, such as physical and mental health of teacher and child and the provision of a conducive educational setting were either unknown or took second place to the main objective—the teaching of the Bible. Challenged by this demand and harassed by the difficult problem of maintaining discipline during strenuous school hours, the teacher quite naturally would try to tackle his task at the point of least resistance—the child. With smaller boys the teacher did not have to fear an experience like that of his early colleagues, who had to contend with pupils who began their studies at the age of sixteen and seventeen years and who “when the teacher got angry rebelled and left.”<sup>1</sup> Rab could find no better advice to give to the elementary teacher than to “cram him (the pupil) like an ox.”<sup>2</sup> Under such circumstances the most convenient means to enforce the necessary discipline and attention was to resort to the time proven efficacy of the rod and strap. Another advice of Rab tended to lessen the severity of this form of corporal punishment that was in vogue in his time. He told a teacher: “If you flog a child, do it only with a shoe strap.”<sup>3</sup> The flogging of school boys was the accepted practice among all other contemporary school systems and the Jewish school offered no exception to the general rule.<sup>4</sup> The Talmud tells of a teacher, who taught without insisting upon being paid by poor pupils and who would straighten out unruly boys by giving them little gifts.<sup>5</sup>

But this teacher was the exception rather than the rule in his profession.

With discipline and attention fairly well assured, what were the methods the teacher employed in his work? How did he "make the children read" the Bible?

We have dwelt before on the first step the little boy took on his long road to know the Bible—the study of the aleph bet.<sup>6</sup> There are two stories in the Talmud concerning the teaching of the aleph bet, which indicate the method that the Rabbis considered most desirable. In the Palestinian Talmud we read: "It happened on a very rainy day that the scholars did not come to the House of Study. And the children entered there and said: come, let us see to it that learning should not be interrupted in the House of Study. So they said: why two letters—mem mem, nun nun, tsade tsade, pe pe and kaph kaph? From word (ma'amer) to word, from a true one (ne'eman) to a true one, from a righteous one (tsadik) to a righteous, from mouth (peh) to mouth and from the hand (kaph) of God to the hand of Moses. The scholars kept their eyes on these children and they all grew up to be great men. It is said that R. Eliezer and R. Joshua came from this group."<sup>7</sup> The other example is recorded in the Babylonian Talmud and deals with the entire aleph bet: "The scholars said to R. Joshua b. Levi: the children came today to the House of Study and said things the like of which were not said even in the days of Joshua the son of Nun: Aleph bet—elaph binah (learn understanding), gimel dalet—gemol dallim (deal kindly with the poor). Why is the foot of the gimmel stretched towards the dalet? Because a charitable man runs after the poor. And why is the foot of the dalet stretched towards the gimel? Because he (the poor) should let himself be found. And why is the face of the dalet turned away from the gimel? Because he benefits him secretly, so as not to shame him. He, Wav is the name of God. Zayin, bet, tet, yood, kaph, lamed; if you do so, God will feed (zan) you, be merciful (han) to you, do good (meTib) to you, give you an inheritance (yerushah) and crown you for the world to come (keter le'olam haba). Open mem, closed mem: open word (ma'amer), closed word. Nun bent, nun straight: a true one (ne'eman) bent, a true one straight. Samekh, ayin: support the poor (semokh aniyim)—another interpretation: put signs

(simanim) to the Torah and acquire it. Pe bent, Pe straight: open mouth (peh) closed mouth. Tsade bent, tsade straight: a righteous one (tsadik) bent, a righteous one straight. . . . Koph: the holy one (kadosh). Resh: the evil doer (rasha). Why is the face of the koph turned away from the resh? Because God says: I can not look at the evil doer. And why is the crown of the koph facing the resh? Says God: if he will return, I shall adorn him with a crown like mine. And why is the leg of the koph loose (leaving an opening)? Because if he returns he will find admission. . . . Shin: falsehood (sheker). Tav: truth (emet). Why are the letters of sheker close together (according to the aleph bet) and the letters of emet far apart? Because falsehood is frequent and truth infrequent. And why does sheker stand on one leg (koph) and emet rests securely like a brick? Because truth will stand and falsehood will not stand."<sup>8</sup>

These two illustrations indicate the desire to combine the teaching of the aleph bet with a moral aim. The shape of the letters, wherever possible, is used as a mnemonic device to help the children retain the appearance and order of the letters as well as to remind them of the moral message. With the hearty approval of the Rabbis this method was bound to find a wide application. The same references also prove, that the elementary teacher was free to device and choose his own methods to teach his pupils the aleph bet. In that respect there is a resemblance between the teaching of the aleph bet and the teaching of the alpha beta in the Greek school. The elementary teacher in Athens also tried to facilitate the learning of the alpha beta through dramatizing it. He would teach it in the form of a song, or devise some guessing game that was based upon the shape of the letters.<sup>9</sup>

Following his mastery of the aleph bet, the pupil went on to the reading of the Pentateuch. The difficulty he now faced was how to pronounce words that were made up of consonantal letters only. There were no vowels to help him.<sup>10</sup> Nor he could tell where a verse began or ended, except at the end of whole passages, as the scroll had no signs or dividing spaces between the sentences.

Under such circumstances the only possible way in which the reading of the text could be taught was the following: The teacher read one verse at a time, letting the children repeat each word after

him from the text. Tradition demanded that a verse could not be broken up into parts, but had to be read in its entirety at one time.<sup>11</sup> The Talmud records one concession that was made to help the teacher in his work: "Said R. Hanina the reader, I had great pain from R. Hanina the Great, for he did not permit me to divide a verse, except when teaching it to school children."<sup>12</sup> The teacher would repeat the verse in this fashion a number of times, until his pupils had memorized the pronunciation of every word and were able to read the verse by themselves. According to R. Eleazar a teacher had to repeat each lesson four times, while R. Akiba required of him to repeat the lesson "until the pupil had learned it."<sup>13</sup> To make sure of that, he would let the class read the verse without his aid and call upon individual boys to do so. Thus they were bound to know many verses by heart, as indeed the popular question asked of school boys—"quote your verse" indicates.

To facilitate the task of memorizing the correct reading of the verse and to better recognize its beginning and end, the elementary teacher used a method of intonation, called "Pisuk Ta'amim." It is a system of musical notes that set the recitation of the text into a rhythmical sequence of chant in accordance with the meaning and meter of the verse. The origin of this system is reported to go back to very early times and its knowledge was transmitted orally.<sup>14</sup> According to one opinion the teaching of cantillation constituted the legal basis for the payment of teacher's work.<sup>15</sup> The employment of melody, somewhat reminiscent of the way poetry was recited in Greek schools, served a twofold purpose—it appealed to the esthetic sense, making for a greater appreciation of the Bible and it impressed more effectively the content upon the memory of the learner and listener.

The Talmud stresses the desirability of learning aloud and preferably in a sing-song fashion,, even as Torah is still being studied in some Yeshivot today. Beruriah, the wife of R. Meir and scholarly in her own right, rebuked a student whom she had noticed studying quietly, telling him to utilize the vitality of his whole body when learning Torah. The fact, that one of the disciples of R. Eliezer forgot his learning, was explained to be the result of his habit of studying silently.<sup>16</sup> R. Akiba puts it this way: "A song each day,

a song each day." Or, according to a different reading: "Sing it, always sing it."<sup>17</sup> And a later scholar insists upon it rather strongly: "He who reads without intonation and studies the Mishnah without singing, is meant by the verse: "And I also have given them statutes that were not good" (Ezekiel 20, 25).<sup>18</sup> That the Psalms were taught in such fashion, is evident from Hannah's words to her sons, in which the author makes her recall, their father's teaching: "He sang to us the words of David, the Psalmist."<sup>19</sup>

The translation of the Bible into the vernacular followed the pattern of its translation at the synagouge. There the reading of one verse from the Pentateuch was immediately followed by its translation into Aramaic, while from the Prophets three verses could be read at a time before they were translated.<sup>20</sup> The honor of being the Meturgeman or translator could be conferred upon a boy, not yet thirteen years old.<sup>21</sup>

The translation was not always a literal one. It partook to some extent of the nature of an explanation or interpretation of the text in harmony with the teachings of the Oral Law. This double allegiance to the literal and interpreted meaning of the text imposed considerable difficulty upon an authoritative translation, so that when finally a common version had been evolved, no Meturgeman was to deviate from it. Else, he would have exposed himself to the charge of R. Judah, who said: "He who translates a verse literally is a liar, while he who adds to it is a blasphemer."<sup>22</sup> The teacher in the class room used the same official translation, although he was free of course to add his own explanations, so that the pupils would really understand what they translated. Another concession he could avail himself of, was the previously mentioned division of a sentence into smaller units, which made it easier for the students to see the connection between the words of the text and their translation.

To aid memory nothing was found more helpful than frequent reviews. While this is of particular importance to the "bookless" study of the Oral Law, it applies also to the study of the Bible. The Talmud waxes rather eloquent on this subject and illustrates it a number of times. Elisha b. Abuya, who could speak from experience, estimated, that the accomplishments of twenty years of study may be lost in two years, if one were to turn away from further study. The

distinguished R. Eleazar b. Arak, who had lost contact with students and study, forgot his learning to the point where he erred in the reading of a verse from the Torah. Even to study continuously new subjects, without making sure that the old ones are not forgotten, would nearly defeat its own purpose. In so doing one would resemble "a man who sows but does not reap," or as another Tanna puts it: "a woman who bears children and buries them."<sup>23</sup>

The Rabbis did not propose any set number of reviews necessary to remember a lesson. As a general rule they believed the more repetitions the better the results. Hillel's saying, "you cannot compare one who studies his lesson a hundred times to one who studies it a hundred and one times," was proverbial. One student, apparently with a view to the twenty-four books of the canon, prepared his lesson these many times before he went in to see his teacher. Another drew his inspiration from the forty days and nights that Moses spent on Mt. Sinai and prepared his lesson forty times. But the record is held by that teacher, who is reported to have taught a Mishnah lesson four hundred times.<sup>24</sup>

In conclusion a few pedagogical advices that the Rabbis offered to the father and teacher should be mentioned, although we have no way of determining if and to what degree these recommendations were heeded by those who were entrusted with the education of school children.

The father is told to take into account the learning capacity of his son, when teaching him the history of the exodus on Passover: "According to the understanding of the son, his father has to teach him."<sup>25</sup> This idea is akin to the one expressed in Proverbs (22, 6): "Train the boy in accordance with his nature."

Individual differences among students were recognized, although we do not know how they were reckoned with. In Abot the Mishnah distinguishes between four types of students: "Quick to understand but quick to forget . . . slow to understand but slow to forget . . . quick to understand and slow to forget . . . slow to understand and quick to forget." In a more picturesque way the four types are compared to the "sponge, funnel, strainer and a sieve."<sup>26</sup>

While the elementary teacher had little time and training to pay much attention to the individual differences of his pupils, he

should have the virtue of patience. Hillel, himself a model of patience, bluntly said: "An irritable man cannot teach."<sup>27</sup> Some three hundred years later, Raba echoed Hillel's dictum, when he said: "If you see a student whose study is as hard on him as iron, know that it is because of his teacher, who does not show him a friendly disposition."<sup>28</sup> He also had to be a patient man to follow the advice not to rush the pupil from subject to subject, but rather to pause long enough for him to absorb the teacher's instruction.<sup>29</sup>

But not all the patience and skill of the teacher could make up for the lack of ability or desire on the part of the student to learn Torah. So the question arose, what to do with such a student? The Rabbis hesitated to pronounce, that such student should be withdrawn from school and from the influence of the study of Torah. They couched their advice in general terms and said: "The student who did not see a good result in his study for five years, will never see it." R. Jose reduced the trial period to three years.<sup>30</sup> The inference could be drawn accordingly.

The following Boraita with which we bring our treatise to a close is an idealistic account of all the qualifications, which according to the Rabbis are necessary to a greater or lesser degree for the acquisition of Torah knowledge. It presents at the same time an index of the aims to which Jewish education in tannaitic times was dedicated. Entirely in keeping with the religious-ethical aspect of Jewish teachings is the fact, that nearly two-thirds of the forty-eight virtues enumerated here are of that nature:

The Torah is greater than priesthood and royalty; for royalty is acquired with thirty virtues and priesthood with twenty-four, but Torah is acquired with forty-eight qualifications. And these are they: Study, attentive listening, distinctive pronunciation, emotional discernment, intuitive grasp, awe, reverence, humility, cheerfulness, attendance on scholars, attachment to colleagues, discussion with students, sedateness, study of Scriptures and Mishnah, moderation in business, moderation in worldly affairs, moderation in pleasure, moderation in sleep, moderation in conversation, moderation in laughter, patience, a good heart, faith in the sages, resignation under chastisement, recognizing one's place, being content with one's portion, guarding one's words, claiming no merit for oneself, being be-

loved, loving God, loving people, loving righteousness, loving reproof, shunning honor, not boasting of one's learning, not delighting in giving decisions, bearing the yoke with one's colleague, judging him favorably, leading him to truth and peace, being composed in one's study,, asking and answering, listening and adding to one's knowledge, learning with the intention to teach, learning with the intention to practise, making one's teacher wiser, being accurate in one's learning and quoting a thing in the name of the person who said it." <sup>31</sup>



# Notes

## INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Augustine, see Theodore Reinach: *Textes d'Auteurs Grecs et Romains Relatifs au Judaïsme*, Vol. I, pp. 262-264.

<sup>2</sup> Josephus: *Against Apion* 2, 18.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 1, 12. These declarations are part of Josephus' defense of Judaism against its critics and may therefore be exaggerated. Yet their emphasis is impressive enough to offer a valid testimony on the strength of Jewish education in his time.

<sup>4</sup> Philo: *Legatio ad Caium*, 31.

<sup>5</sup> Yer. Ber. end: כל אדם מישראל שאינו עושה מצוות בכל יום, קורא את שבע ומברך לפניו ולאחריו ואוכל את פתו ומברך לפניו ולאחריו ומתפלל שלשה פעמים של שמונה עשרה וחזור ועושה שאר מצוות ומברך עליהן.

<sup>6</sup> Ket. 105a: אמר ר' אושעיא: שלש מאות והשנים וארבעה בתי דינים היו בירושלים. In Yer. Meg. 3, 1-73d בתי מדרשות ומגדן בתי סופרים 480. However "394", not being a "round" number deserves more credence.

<sup>7</sup> Nehemiah, 8-10. Josephus: *Antiquities* 11, 5, 5-7.

<sup>8</sup> Josephus: *Against Apion* 2, 17.

<sup>9</sup> For the first reference to the Gerusia see Josephus: *Antiquities* 12, 3-3, where he tells that Antiochus the Great (223-187) exempted its members from paying taxes. It appears that this body functioned till the time of the Hasmoneans, when a more democratic institution, consisting of 71 sages and called Sanhedrin, came into existence. For a discussion on the history and function of this body see J. Z. Lauterbach: *Sanhedrin* in *Jewish Enc.* Vol. XI, pp. 41-44.

<sup>10</sup> Sanh. 21b. Baba Kama 82b.

<sup>11</sup> Abot 1, 1. According to one opinion recorded in Yer. Shekalim 5, 1-48c they also divided the Oral Law into three divisions of study: Midrash, Halakah and Haggadah. However, another scholar credits R. Akiba with this division. The fact that opinions differ so widely (400-500 years) casts doubts upon the accuracy of either date.

<sup>12</sup> Ber. 33a.

<sup>13</sup> Josephus: *Against Apion* 1, 8 counts only 22 books of the Bible, instead of 24 known today and says: "For during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take



<sup>23</sup> Abot 1, 2: על שלשה דברים העולם עומד: על התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים.

<sup>24</sup> It is assumed that the term "wisdom" which the author employs stands for Torah.

<sup>25</sup> Agrippa I (d. 44 C.E.) was an exception. Although not of pure Jewish descent he was so beloved that the scholars publicly said to him: "You are our brother"—Mishnah Sotah 7, 8.

<sup>26</sup> This dual aspect of the messianic age is already evident in the Prophets: On the one hand, national liberation, ingathering of exiles and Israel's glory and on the other hand, universal brotherhood and recognition of God and virtual transformation of physical and moral nature of all creatures. Cf. also Talmudic references to two Messiahs: Messiah b. Joseph who will be killed and Messiah b. David who will follow him—Yer. Suk. 5, 2-55b. Suk. 52a. Pesikta Rabbati, ed. Friedman, Ch. 36. Seder Eliyahu R. ed. Friedman, Ch. 18.

<sup>27</sup> Even the great victories of the Maccabean brothers did not deflect the vision from the Messiah. The popular acclamation of Simon's leadership at 140 B.C.E. contained a clause: "until a true prophet should appear," I Macc. 14, 41. The expression "true prophet" refers to Elijah who was thought of either as the Messiah or his herald. Cf. Ben Sira 48, 9-11. On Elijah-Messiah see Louis Ginzberg: Unbekannte Sekte, p. 346 seq. The Legends of the Jews, Vol. I, p. 339, note 105.

<sup>28</sup> Philo: On Curses, 2. On Rewards and Punishments, 15-20.

<sup>29</sup> Yer. Ta'anioth 4, 8-68d: ר' עקיבה כד הוה תמי בר כוונה הוה אמר דין הוא מלכא משיחא.

Lamentation R. 2, 2. Professor Klausner's contention that the people thought of the Messiah in Bar Kochba's time in political rather than in religious terms goes to the other extreme. Religion and nationalism were insolubly interwoven. Joseph Klausner: Die Messianische Vorstellungen des Juedischen Volkes im Zeitalter der Tannaiten, Krakau 1903, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> The commonly held view places the origin of the synagogue in the time of the Babylonian exile. Jonathan b. Uziel ad loc. Exodus 18, 20. Josephus: Against Apion 2, 18. Philo: De Vita Mosis 3, 27 see the beginning of the synagogue in the time of Moses.

<sup>31</sup> The secular and the religious are under the same jurisdiction of the Torah. E. g. not to steal or to honor father and mother and to observe Sabbath and offer the sacrifices were believed to emanate from the same source—God. "Let all thy deeds be for the sake of heaven" was an often quoted saying.

<sup>32</sup> See Josephus: Life 54. Acts 22, 19. II Macc. 3, 10.

<sup>33</sup> Meg. 26b-27a. In a community where the Bet haKenesset and the Bet haMidrash occupied the same building the two names are used interchangeably. The common people still thought of the synagogue in the second century C.E. in terms of its original function and called it Bet Am—

House of the People. The Rabbis resented this, since by that time the religious aspect of the synagogue was predominant. See Shab. 32a.

<sup>34</sup> Tos. Sotah 15, end. Sotah 49a-b.

<sup>35</sup> Mekilta 61b ad loc. Exodus 19, 1: לא רציתם להשתעבד לשמים הרי אתם משועבדים לפני גוים לא רציתם לשקול לשמים בקע לגולגולת הרי אתם שוקלים חרשה עשר שקלים במלכות אויביכם Judaeus. The "fifteen Shekel" are obviously the fiscus Judaicus exacted of the defeated Jews.

<sup>36</sup> Abot of R. N. 4, 5. Gitin 56a-b.

<sup>37</sup> See E. Schuerer: Geschichte des Juedischen Volkes, Vol. I, p. 695, note 137. On the bitterness and devastation of the war see Dio Cassius: Epitome LXIX, 11-15, ed. S. A. B. Mercer: Extra Biblical Sources for Jewish History, London, 1913. Lamentations R. 7, 2. Shir haShirim R. 11, 7. B. Bitra 60b. Mommsen speaks of this war as one "which in intensity and duration has no comparison in the history of the Roman Empire"—Roemische Geschichte, Vol. V, p. 545. On resulting religious oppression see Mekilta 68b ad loc. Exodus 20, 5. Sanh. 14a.

<sup>38</sup> 109b, ad loc. Lev. 25, 35. Sotah 49a.

<sup>39</sup> Sifra 40b, ad loc. Deut. 11, 12: ר"א אומר: ספר וסייף ירדו כרוכים מן השמים. אחר להם, אם עשיתם את התורה הכתובה בזה אתם נצולים מזה ואם לאו הרי אתם לוקים בו.

<sup>40</sup> M. Horayot 3, 8: ממזר תלמיד חכם קדם לכהן גדול עם הארץ.

<sup>41</sup> Lev. 19. 2.

<sup>42</sup> The Septuagint translates "Torah" with "Nomos"—"Law." So do Philo: Legatio ad Caium, 31 and Josephus: Ant. 4, 8-12.

<sup>43</sup> In his great book, Religion der Vernunft (p. 393) Herman Cohen points out the correlation of law and teaching to be immanent in a monotheistic legislation.

<sup>44</sup> Shab. 31a. Hag. 3b. Cf. Sifra 112b, ad loc. Lev. 26, 46.

<sup>45</sup> Ber. 62a: תורה היא וללמוד אני צריך. One later scholar claimed, that "even that which a mature student will in the future decide in the presence of his teacher was already said to Moses at Sinai." — Yer. Hag. 1, 8-76d.

<sup>46</sup> Abot of R. N. 31, 3. In the Talmud the number is put at 974—Shab. 88b. Hag. 13b.

<sup>47</sup> Shab. 88b.

<sup>48</sup> Yer. 9, 6-20c.

<sup>49</sup> R. Hashanah 18a.

<sup>50</sup> Boraita Sanh. 98b.

<sup>51</sup> Nehemiah 8, 8. Sifre 112a, ad loc. Numbers 15, 31. Sanh. 99a. Josephus, speaking of all the books of the Bible, says: "which are justly believed to be divine"—Against Apion, 1, 8.

<sup>52</sup> Mishnah Sanh. 10, 1: ואלו שאין להם חלק לעוה"ב האומר: .... ואין תורה מן השמים.

<sup>53</sup> Mishnah Meg. 3, 1. Yer. Ked. 4, 5-66a. B. Kama 2b. Moed Katan 5a.

Hulin 137a, see Rashi ad loc. But see Sifre 306 ad loc. Deut. 32, 1, where a verse written by Jeremiah is considered as having been written by God.

<sup>53</sup> 18 such emendations, or Tikkune Soferim are cited in Mekilta 49a, ad loc. Exodus 15, 7. Cf. Gen. R. 49, 12.

<sup>54</sup> Maimonides: Thirteen Articles of Faith in Daily Prayer Book. Cf. Maimonides: Mishnah Commentary, Sanh. Ch. 9.

<sup>55</sup> Sifre 41b, ad loc. Deut. 11, 13. Yer. Hag. 1, 7-76c. Kid. 40b.

<sup>56</sup> On the education of girls see pp.

<sup>57</sup> Mishnah Hag. 1, 1.

<sup>58</sup> Mishnah Suk. 3, 15: קטן היודע לזנוק חייב בלולב. Tos. Hag. 1, 3: קטן שאינו צריך לאמן חיבי בסוכה, יודע לעטף חייב בציצית, יודע לשמר תפילין אביו לוקח לו תפילין, יודע לדבר אביו מלמדו שבע ותורה ולשון קודש. The verses referred to are: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One" — Deut. 6, 4 and "Moses commanded us the Torah, it is an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob." — Deut. 33, 4.

<sup>59</sup> Numbers 7, 84. Deut. 20, 5. Psalms 30, 1. Nehemiah 12, 27. Yer. Moed Katan 1, 6-80d.

<sup>60</sup> Prov. 22, 6. This translation is at variance with that of the J. P. S. translation of the Bible which translates: "Train up a child in the way he should go." The author's translation is supported by Metzudat David and Malbim ad loc.

<sup>61</sup> Mishnah Yoma 8, 4, cf. Yoma 82a. Nazir 29a. Yer. Yoma 1, 1-50b.

<sup>62</sup> Mishnah Pe'ah 1, 1: כיבוד אב ואם וגמילת חסדים והבאת שלום בין אדם לחברו. Cf. Shab. 127a.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. דברים שאין להם שעור הפאה והבכורים והראיון וגמילת חסדים ותלמוד תורה.

<sup>64</sup> Yer. Ber. 9, 8-14d. Abot 1, 13.

<sup>65</sup> Ber. 35b Cf. Abot 2, 2. Mishnah Kid. 4, 14. R. Simeon b. Yohai did not go so far as to advocate celibacy. The only Tanna known to have never married is Ben Azzai, who defended his conduct with these words: "What shall I do, my soul thirsts for Torah"—Yeb. 63b.

<sup>66</sup> "School" comes from the Greek word "scholē" which means "leisure."

<sup>67</sup> Abot of R. N. 2, 9: אל ישנה אדם אלא למי שהוא חכם ועניו וכן. אבות ועשיר. ובה"א אומרים: לכל אדם ישנה.

<sup>68</sup> Berf. 28a. Another tradition speaks of "700 benches," ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Abot 6, 4. Bor. Yoma 35b. Betzah 37b. Moed Katan 26b. Ket. 49b-50a. Mishnah Hor. 3, 8. etc.

<sup>70</sup> Mishnah Sotah 3, 16. Sotah 21a. Pes. 50b and parallels. Abot 3, 17. Abot of R. N. 24, 1. Tos. Ber. 6, 17.

<sup>71</sup> Kid. 40b. Abot 2, 6. Abot 1, 17.

<sup>72</sup> The wording of the benediction אשר קדשנו במצוותיו points to the relationship between the fulfillment of the Mitzvot and the sanctification of life.

<sup>73</sup> Abot 3, 17. Cf. Ber. 35a.

מצות האב על הבן למולו לפדותו וללמדו תורה: 74 Tos. Kid. 1, 8. Kid. 30b: וללמדו אומנות ולהשיאו אשה. ר' יהודה אינר כל שאינו מלמד את בנו אומנות כאלו מלמדו לטעות.

75 Mishnah Ket. 5, 5.

76 Abot 2, 2. Cf. Abot 1, 10. Abot of R. N. 10, 1.

77 Mishnah Kid. 1, 10: כלי שישנו במקרא ובמשנה ובדרך ארץ לא במהרה הוא חוטא.

78 E. g. Mishnah Shab. 22, 6: "One may (on the Sabbath) oil and massage the stomach, but not exercise the body and not scrape." See Maimonides' commentary ad loc. Saul Lieberman: Greek in Jewish Palestine, New York, 1942, pp. 92-97, explains the Mishnah to refer to practices used by wrestlers. Cf. S. Krauss: Talmudische Archaeology, Vol. I, p. 209 and Vol. III, p. 113.

79 Tos. Suk. 4, 3. Suk. 53a. Ket. 17a. Hulin 30b.

80 Tos. Kid. 1, 8.

## CHAPTER I: THE CHILD

1 Nedarim 64b: ותניא ארבעה חשובין כמת.... ומי שאין לו בנים.

2 Genesis 1, 28. Yebamot 62a.

3 Pcs. 65a. Sanh. 100b: ואי אפשר לעולם בלא זכרים ובלא נקבות אשרי מי שבניו זכרים.

4 Nid. 30b. Cf. Louis Ginsberg: Legends of the Jews, J. P. S. Philadelphia, 1947, Vol. V, p. 75, note 20.

5 Bor: Shab. 151b: תניא ר' שמעון בן גמליאל אומר: תינוק בן יומא חי מחללין. עליו את השבת. עליו את השבת. דוד מלך ישראל מת אין מחללין עליו את השבת.

6 Mishnah Shab. 19, 5. Yeb. 64b.

7 On infanticide during that period see W. E. H. Lecky: History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne, Vol. II, p. 20 and W. G. Sumner: Folkways, Boston, 1940, pp. 318-319.

8 Mishnah Sanh. 4, 5: לפיכך גברא אדם יחידי ללמוד.... שכל המאבד גופא איש מבני אדם מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו איבד עולם מלא.

9 II Macc. 7, 28. Ket. 60a.

10 Shab. 119b. Mishnah Nid. 10, 1. Yoma 23a.

11 Mishnah Nid. 5, 4: בת ג' שנים ויום א' מתקדשת בביאה.... וחייבין עליה. בשום אשה איש.

12 Tos. Hag. 1, 3. Suk. 2a-b.

13 Mishnah Suk. 2, 8.

14 Ber. 47b.

15 Suk. 42a. Arahin 2b. Tos. Hag. 1, 3. Mishnah Meg. 4, 6. Tos. Tos. Meg. 2, 4.

16 Mishnah Yoma 8, 4. Cf. Yoma 82a. Tos. Yoma 4, 2. Pes. 109a.

17 Abot 5, 21: בן שלש עשרה למצוה.

18 R. Eliyahu of Vilna adds here in the text: "when he was thirteen years old," see Soferim 18, 5.

19 Ibid.

20 Josephus: Vita, 2.

<sup>21</sup> Abot of R. N. 16, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Mishnah Nid. 5, 6: גדריו קיימין: א' בן י"ג שנים ויום א' גדריו קיימין. L. Loew apparently overlooked these references, when he so emphatically stated: "The Bar Mitzvah institution is in its idea and practice an anti-Talmudical reform" — Leopold Loew: *Die Lebensalter in der Juedischen Literatur*, p. 210.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Mishnah Nid. 5, 5, 9, 6, 11.

<sup>25</sup> On Ketanah see Mishnah Nid. 5, 4. Yebamot 13, 1. On Na'arah see Mishnah Ket. 4, 4. 29a. 47a. On Bogeret see Yer. Ket. 4, 1-28a. Ket 57b. B. Batra 139b. Nid. 47a.

<sup>26</sup> The deaf-mute too was considered to lack sufficient mental capacities. His mind was believed to be poor and confused and he was thought unable to express himself in writing. See Yeb. 113a-b and Rashi ad loc. Cit. 71a and Rashi ad loc.

<sup>27</sup> Mishnah B. Kama 8, 4: חרש שוטה וקטן פגיעתן רעה. החובל בהן חייב והם: שחבלו אחרים פטורין.

<sup>28</sup> Mishnah Kelim 17, 15. Taharot 8, 6. Makshirim 3, 8. 6, 1: חרש שוטה: וקטן .... שיש להן מעשה ואין להן מחשבה.

<sup>29</sup> Mishnah Arakin 1, 1.

<sup>30</sup> Mishnah Arakin 1, 1: חרש שוטה וקטן .... אבל לא נודרין ולא מעריכין. מפני שאין בהם דעת Cf. B. Batra 155a-b.

<sup>31</sup> Mishnah Hulin, 1, 1. Meg. 2, 4.

<sup>32</sup> Shab. 119a. A later source explains the custom of letting the children commence the study of the Bible with Leviticus thus: "Let the pure (children) come and study the pure" (sacrifices)—Lev. R. 7, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Mishnah Parah 3, 2-3.

<sup>34</sup> Mishnah Arakin 2, 6: אין קטן נכנס לעזרה לעבודה אלא בשעה שהלויים עומדים: ולא היו אומרים בנבל וכנור אלא בפה כדי ליתן תבל בנעימה.

<sup>35</sup> Mishnah Shab. 9, 7.

<sup>36</sup> Zebahim 88b.

<sup>37</sup> Mishnah Kelim 28, 1, see R. Asher and Bertinoro ad loc. Mishnah Betzah 2, 10. Tos. Shab. 10, 3.

<sup>38</sup> An exception is Plato who holds that co-education should prevail for gifted boys and girls, see Republic, 5.

<sup>39</sup> E. g. "Women are glutenous"—Mishnah Taharot 7, 9. "Do not talk much with a woman"—Abot 1, 5. "Women are light minded"—Kid. 80b. Shab. 33b. "Even the best of women practices witchcraft"—Soferim 15, end.

<sup>40</sup> Mishnah Sotah 3, 4.

<sup>41</sup> Mekilta 70a ad loc. Exodus 20, 12. Kid. 30b-31a. Yeb. 62b-63a. Sanh. 22a. Ber. 17a. Tos. Kelim II, 1, 3. Erubin 53b-54a. Ned. 50a.

<sup>42</sup> Yer. Suk. 5, 2-55b. Cf. Tos. Suk. 4, 1. Suk. 51b.

<sup>43</sup> Tos. Meg. 3, 5: הכל עולין למנין שבעה אפילו קטן אפילו אשה.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. Meg. 23a.

<sup>45</sup> E. g. A married woman who in public has her hair uncovered, or who

does her weaving in the market place, or who talks with all men, may be divorced with the loss of her Ketubah—Mishnah Ket. 7, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Mishnah Kid. 4, 13.

<sup>47</sup> Mishnah Ket. 5, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Even marriages before that age were not uncommon, see Ket. 46b. Yeb. 107a. Nid. 47a. How anxious parents were to marry their daughter off is indicated in a saying of the people of Jerusalem: "If your daughter has matured, free your servant (if need be) and give her to him"—Pes. 113a.

<sup>49</sup> Mishnah Sotah 3, 4: אומר בן עזאי חייב אדם ללמוד את בתו תורה.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. ר' אליעזר אומר, כל המלמד את בתו תורה לנדה תפלות. The Talmud explains: לאילן לנדה תפלות — Sotah 21b.

<sup>51</sup> Mishnah Nedarim 4, 3: ואם בנותיו מקרא. One modern writer wishes to reconcile this statement with R. Eliezer's objection by distinguishing between the teaching of the Bible and the teaching of the Oral Law, supposedly referred to in the Mishnah of Sotah. The statement of the Mishnah of Nedarim he expands into the assumption, that "very few girls indeed, were deprived of an elementary education." See Nathan Drazin: *History of Jewish Education from 515 B. C. E. to 220 C. E.* Baltimore, 1940, pp. 129-130. This explanation is untenable, because (a) the Mishnah of Sotah uses the term "Torah", which does not refer to the Oral Law alone, (b) on the contrary, the internal evidence points to the teaching of Biblical passages, like those that deal with the laws of the Sotah — see Rashi ad loc. Sotah 3, 4 — and (c) the wording of the mishnaic text in Nedarim — "he may teach his sons and daughters the Bible" — does not warrant the broad generalization on the elementary education of the girls. The corresponding version of the Nedarim Mishnah in the Palestinian Talmud does not read ואם בנותיו — "and his daughters" altogether. But the reading of the Mishnah in the Babylonian Talmud and in the separate Mishnah edition appears to be the correct one, as a commission is more proof than an omission, which may well be due to an accidental oversight.

<sup>52</sup> Mishnah Kid. 4, 13: ולא תלמד אשה ספרים. See Kid. 82a.

<sup>53</sup> Nathan Morris: *The Jewish School*, London, 1937, pp. 203-223. B. Strassburger: *Geschichte der Erziehung bei den Israeliten*, Stuttgart, 1885, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> E. g. "And she (Rachel) said to her father, let not my lord be angry"—Genesis 31, 35. "Ye shall fear every man his mother and his father"—Lev. 19, 3. "A son honoreth his father and a servant his master"—Malachi 1, 6. "It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth"—Lamentations 3, 27. "He that spareth the rod hateth his son"—Prov. 13, 24. "He that loveth his son will continue to lay strokes on him"—Ben Sira 30, 1.

<sup>55</sup> N. Morris: op. cit. p. 221.

<sup>56</sup> E. g. Child often called "Tinok." One Rabbi calls childhood "a crown of roses"—Shab. 152a. Some toys and furniture are mentioned—Mishnah Kelim 5, 1. Betzah 2, 10. Shab. 58b. Zeb. 88a.

<sup>57</sup> E. g. The relationship between Jacob and Joseph, Eli and his two sons, David and his two rebellious sons, Adonijah and Absalom and the prophetic comparison of the love of God for Israel with the love of parents for their children. It may also be reasoned, that the very fact, that Biblical passages recommend (not command) the use of the rod, would indicate that parents were too indulgent with their offspring.

<sup>58</sup> Ket. 50a. See Rashi ad loc.

<sup>59</sup> Mishnah Ket. 4, 6. Ket. 49a-b.

<sup>60</sup> Suk. 29a. Mishnah Makkot 2, 2.

<sup>61</sup> Mishnah Semahot 2, 4-6: מִסָּאן אִמְרוּ חֲכָמִים אֵל יִרְאֶה אָדָם תִּינוּק בְּאוֹנוֹ אֵלָּא מִלְקִיָּהוּ מִיָּד וְלֹא יֵאמַר לוֹ כְּלוּם.

<sup>62</sup> Mishnah Semahot 2, 6. Sanh. 107a. Sotah 47a.

<sup>63</sup> Sanh. 105a.

<sup>64</sup> Solomon Schechter: Studies in Judaism, First Series, J. P. S. Philadelphia, 1911, p. 305.

## CHAPTER II: ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCHOOL

<sup>1</sup> Mekilta 22b. Mishnah Kid. 1, 7. Tos. Kid. 1, 8: חַיִּיב אָדָם מִן הַחוּרָה לְמַלּוֹל אֶת בְּנוֹ וּלְפָדוֹתוֹ וּלְלַמְדוֹ תּוֹרָה וּלְלַמְדוֹ אוֹמוֹנוֹת וּלְהַשְׁיָאוֹ אֶשֶׁה דְּתוֹנִיָּא וּלְמַדְתָּם אוֹתָם אֶת בְּנוֹיָם אֵין לִי אֵלָּא בְּנוֹיָם בְּנֵי בְּנוֹיָם מִנִּין ח"ל וְהַדּוּעָתָם לְבִנְיָן וּלְבִנְיָן בְּנִין. The father's duty preceded that of the grandfather.

<sup>2</sup> IV Maccabees, end, The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, ed. R. H. Charles, Oxford 1913, pp. 684-685.

<sup>3</sup> Philo: Hypothetica 7, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Yer. Ket. 8, 12-32c: וְשִׁיחָה הַתִּינוּקוֹת . . . . . וְשִׁיחָה דְּבָרִים. הוֹלְכִין לְבֵית הַסֵּפֶר.

<sup>5</sup> Baba Batra 21a:

<sup>6</sup> I. Halevy: יְדוּרוֹת הָרִאשׁוֹנִים, Vol. I-3, p. 366. Aaron Hyman: תּוֹלָדוֹת תְּנָאִים וְאִמּוֹרָאִים, Vol. II, p. 62.

<sup>7</sup> Yeb. 61a. Yoma 18a: עַד לִינְאִי מַלְכָּא עַד. דְּמוּקִי לִיָּה לִיהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן גַּמְלָא בְּכַהְנֵי רַבְרַבִּי. Cf. Mishnah Yeb. 6, 4.

<sup>8</sup> I. H. Weiss: דּוֹר דּוֹר וְדוֹרֵשׁוֹ, Vol. I, p. 182.

<sup>9</sup> Josephus: Antiquities 20, 9-4. War of the Jews 4, 3-9. 4, 5-2.

<sup>10</sup> חוֹסֶפֶת יְשׁוּעִים ad loc. Yeb. 61a.

<sup>11</sup> Baba Batra 133b.

<sup>12</sup> See Abot 1, 4-8.

<sup>13</sup> Josephus: Ant. 20, 9-4.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. T. J. Tavyomi: טַל אִוְרוֹת, Tel Aviv, 1948, p. 123. J. J. Greenwald: יְדוּרוֹת הָרִאשׁוֹנִים, p. 139. See also Gitin 46a, where a "Martha, daughter of Boethus" is mentioned in connection with the siege of Jerusalem prior to its destruction.

<sup>15</sup> W. Bacher: Das Alt-Juedische Schulwesen, JJGL, 4 (1903), pp. 48-81.

<sup>16</sup> According to Professor Zeitlin, who bases his view upon a different

reading in  $\text{לִשְׁנָתוֹ}$  ad loc. Hag. 13a, it was Joshua b. Gamala who opposed the exclusion of the book of Ezekiel from the canon. Being responsible for the elementary education enactment, he also watched over the Bible curriculum taught in the school. See S. Zeitlin: AAJR, 1931-1932, Vol. III, p. 127.

<sup>17</sup> Louis Ginzberg: *The Primary School*, in *Students, Scholars and Saints*, Philadelphia, 1943, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Nathan Morris, op. cit. p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> N. Drazin: op. cit. pp. 37-46.

<sup>20</sup> See M. Guedeman, *Jewish Encyclopedia*, article on education, Vol. V, p. 43, B. Strassburger: *Geschichte der Erziehung bei den Israeliten*, p. 20. Joseph Wiesen: *Geschichte und Methode des Schulwesens in Talmudischen Altertume*, Strassburg, 1892, p. 6. Salo W. Baron: *The Jewish Community*, Philadelphia, 1945, Vol. III, p. 23, note 8.

<sup>21</sup> Except for Sparta, where education of the youth was a state function.

<sup>22</sup> According to Nehemiah, Ch. 7 there were in the middle of the fourth century B.C.E. about 15,000 Jews in Jerusalem and ten times that number in the rest of Judea. Cf. Samuel Klein: *ארץ יהודה*, Tel Aviv, 1939, p. 13. See also Arthur Rupp: *Soziologie der Juden*, Vol. I, p. 69.

<sup>23</sup> William Boyd: *The History of Western Civilization*, London 1932, p. 64.

<sup>24</sup> The intimate connection between Written—and Oral Law is evident in the translation of the Bible into the Aramaic "Targum." The Targum, whose beginnings go back according to Rab to the time of Ezra—see Meg. 3a. Ned. 37b. Yer. Meg. 4, 1-74d—combines literal translation with brief exegetical commentary. R. Eliezer, warning against a literal translation of the text, advised his students:  $\text{בְּנוֹעֵי בְּיָדְכֶם מִן הַתְּגִיין}$ , "refrain your sons from merely reading the Bible"—Ber. 28b. For the translation of  $\text{הַתְּגִיין}$  with "reading" see J. Levy: *Woerterbuch ueber die Talmudim und Midrashim*, Vol. I, p. 450. According to Sifre 161b, ad loc. Deut. 17, 19 the Targum occupies an intermediate position between Mikra and Mishna.

<sup>25</sup> I Macc. 14, 27-28.

<sup>26</sup> The story of the break with the Pharisees is reported in Josephus and in the Talmud. But according to Josephus—Ant. 13, 10-5, 6—it occurred under Hyrcanus, while the Talmud—Kid. 66a—speaks of "King Jannai." However, since the Talmud calls other Hasmonean princes also by the name "King Jannai"—see above pp. 47-48—Josephus' account naming Hyrcanus seems to be the correct one. Under Alexander Jannaeus the relations with the Pharisees worsened still further, see Josephus: Ant. 13, 13-5.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. novellae of R. S. R. Edels (Maharsha) ad loc. Baba Batra 21a.

<sup>28</sup> According to an interpretation of the term "your sons" it meant also "your pupils," see Sifre 45b, ad loc. Deut. 6, 7. Cf. Sanh. 19b, 99b.

<sup>29</sup> Kid. 66a.

<sup>30</sup> See above p. 50.

<sup>31</sup> Abot of R. N. 4, 5. Gitin 56b.

<sup>32</sup> F. H. Swift: *Education in Ancient Israel*, p. 86. N. Drazin: op. cit.

- p. 46. Louis Grossman: article on Pedagogics, Jewish Enc. Vol. IX, p. 571.  
 Joseph Klausner: היסטוריה ישראלית, Jerusalem 1923, Vol. III, p. 149.  
<sup>33</sup> B. Metzia 85b. Ket. 103b.  
<sup>34</sup> Shab. 119b: כל עיר שאין בה תינוקות של בית רבן מחריבין (מחרימין) אותה.  
<sup>35</sup> Abot 4, 20.  
<sup>36</sup> N. Morris: op. cit. p. 23.  
<sup>37</sup> Yer. Hag. 2, 1-77b.  
<sup>38</sup> In Yer. Ta'an. 4, 8-69a the Talmud puts the number of Betar's school boys at 500 x 500, while in Gitin 58a the corresponding number is 400 x 400 x 400.  
<sup>39</sup> Cf. Hillel's observation: "An Am haAretz cannot be a pious person"—Abot 2, 5. On the laxity of his religious conduct see Ber. 47b. Sotah 22a.  
<sup>40</sup> Ber. 47b: איזהו עם הארץ? . . . . . ר' נתן בר יוסף אומר, כל שיש לו בנים ואינו מגדלם לתלמוד תורה.  
<sup>41</sup> Baba Batra 8a.  
<sup>42</sup> Mishnah Hag. 2, 7. Yer. Hor. 3, 7-48a. Pes. 49a-b.  
<sup>43</sup> Baba Metzia 85a: וכל המלמד את בן עם הארץ תורה אפילו הקבי"ה גוזר גזירה מבטלו בשבילו.

### CHAPTER III: THE ELEMENTARY TEACHER

- <sup>1</sup> Suk. 28a Cf. Abot 1, 16. Ber. 27b. Ta'an. 7b.  
<sup>2</sup> See above pp. 53-55.  
<sup>3</sup> E. g. B. Batra 8b. 21a. Ket. 103b. Abodah Zarah 3b. In Pes. 49b Melamed Tinokot" appears in a tannaitic quotation.  
<sup>4</sup> Mishnah Kid. 4, 13: לא ילמד אדם רווק סופרים. The fact that "Sofer" refers here to an elementary teacher is indicated in the second half of the statement: "neither shall a woman teach as Sofer." It is unlikely that a woman was thought capable of teaching secondary subjects. The Talmud ad loc. explains this injunction as a precautionary measure, designed to restrict the contact between the unmarried teacher and the fathers or mothers who brought their little sons to school.  
<sup>5</sup> Suk. 29a.  
<sup>6</sup> Tos. Meg. 3, 19: והסופר מלמד כדרכו.  
<sup>7</sup> E. g. Yer. Pe'ah 8, 7-21a. Hag. 1, 7-76c. Yeb. 12, 7-13a. From Yer. Meg. 3, 4-74a it is evident, that in Palestine the elementary teacher was called "Sofer" also in post-tannaitic times.  
<sup>8</sup> See Yer. Ta'an. 4, 8-69a. Ket. 105a.  
<sup>9</sup> To indicate the minute attention the Soferim gave to the text a Rabbi derives the word "Sofer" from "Safor"—to count, because they "counted all the letters of the Torah."—Kid. 30a.  
<sup>10</sup> E. g. Mishnah Sanh. 4, 3. Git. 3, 1. 7, 2. B. Metzia 5, 11. Occasionally the term "Sofer" was still used in its original meaning, as in Sotah 15a:

— "Said R. Gamaliel to the Soferim, leave it to me and I will explain it."

<sup>11</sup> Mishnah Sotah 9, 15 in the "Jerusalem Mishnah," ed. W. H. Lowe, p. 105b: כספריא וספריא למהוי חכמים שרו המקדש בית המקדש שרו חכמים למהוי כספריא וספריא. כספריא וספריא. A variant reading in the common Mishnah edition and in the Palestinian Talmud quotes R. Eliezer instead of R. Joshua and compares the Sofer to the Hazzan: ר' אליעזר הגדול אומר מיום שביית המקדש חרב שרו חכמים למהוי כספריא וספריא כחזניא, וחזניא כעמא דארעא

<sup>12</sup> Yer. Yeb. 12, 7-13a: בני סימונייא אתון לגבי רבי אמרון ליה בעא תתן לן חד בר. נש דריש דיין וחזן ספר מתניין ועבד לן כל צרכינן.

<sup>13</sup> Mishnah Yoma, 7, 1. Sotah 7, 7-8. Tos. Meg. 3, 13. Suk. 4, 7. Suk. 51b. Rashi calls the Hazzan "Shamash" or sexton, referring to the more menial aspect of his occupation, *ibid.* ad loc. Etymologically, the term "Hazzan" is derived either from the Hebrew חזן, or according to F. Delitzsch: *Assyrisches Handwoerterbuch*, p. 273, from the Assyrian "hazzanu," both of which mean to oversee and supervise.

<sup>14</sup> Mishnah Shab. 1, 3: החזן רואה היכן התינוקות קוראים.

<sup>15</sup> Fletcher H. Swift: *Education in Ancient Israel*, p. 60. Vol. IV, p. 650.

<sup>16</sup> A. R. S. Kennedy: art. on Education, *Hasting's Bible Dictionary*,

<sup>17</sup> Still another name for the scribe and judiciary clerk was "Livlar," from the Latin "libelarius," see Mishnah Shab. 1, 3. Git. 3, 1. Yer. Git. 3, 2-44d. Sanh. 17b. etc. How closely the term "Sofer" became associated with the elementary teacher is evident in this later source which speaks of a non-Jewish Sofer — סופר ארמי — as children's teacher, see B. Batra 21a.

<sup>18</sup> Mishnah Kid. 4, 13: לא ילמד אדם ריוק ולא תלמד אשה סופרים.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* ר"א אומר אף מי שאין לו אשה לא ילמד סופרים.

<sup>20</sup> Abot 2, 6: ולא הקפדן מלמד.

<sup>21</sup> B. Batra 21a. 22a: קנאת סופרים תרבה חכמה. That "Soferim" refers here to school teachers is evident from the context.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Suk. 29a. B. Batra 21a.

<sup>23</sup> Shab. 13a: תינוקות הואיל ואימת רבן עליהן.

<sup>24</sup> Sanh. 104b. Lev. R. 9, 2.

<sup>25</sup> B. Metzia 85b. Ket. 103b. See above p. 59 for full quotation of story.

<sup>26</sup> Rab received his ordination from R. Judah I at whose academy he was a student. See Sanh. 5a.

<sup>27</sup> B. Batra 8b.

<sup>28</sup> Ta'an. 24a.

<sup>29</sup> Mishnah Ned. 4, 3: המודד הגאה מחבירו.... ומלמדו מדרש הלכות ואגדות. אבל לא ילמדנו מקרא, אבל מלמד הוא את בניו ואת בנותי מקרא.

<sup>30</sup> Ned. 37a: שר שימור, שר פיסוק טעמים. Cf. explanation of R. Nissim ad loc.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* Yer. Ned. 4, 3-38c: מה אני בחינם אף אתם בחינם.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. יכול מקרא ותרגום כן תלמוד לומר הקים ומשפטים אתם. מלמדין בחינם ואי אתם מלמדין בחינם מקרא ותרגום.

<sup>33</sup> Yer. Hag. 1, 7-66c. Ned. 4, 3-38c. Pe'ah 8, 7-21a. Lev. R. 30, 1.

<sup>34</sup> See p. 66, note 7.

<sup>35</sup> Yer. Hag. 1, 1-76c: תני ר"ש בן יוחי אם ראית עיירות שנתלשו ממקומן בארץ ישראל דע שלא החזיקו בשכר סופרים ומשנים.

<sup>36</sup> Yer. Pe'ah 8, 7-21a. The parallel discussion in the Babylonian Talmud — B. Batra 8a — on the taxes of a new resident does not mention the school tax. Dr. Baron's assertion that a temporary settler had to contribute "after two months to the school budget" is not supported by the sources. See S. W. Baron: op. cit. Vol. I, p. 136. Cf. JQR XXXIV (1943), p. 373 et seq.

<sup>37</sup> Lev. R. 30, 1. According to Rashi, Jose b. Nehorai was the teacher of R. Johanan, leading Palestinian Amora of the first generation. According to Tosafot he was a Tanna. See B. Metzia 41a-b, ad loc.

<sup>38</sup> Betzah 16a: תני רב תחליפא אחוה דרבנאי חוואה כל מזונותיו של אדם קצובים לו: מראש השנה ועד יום הכפורים חוץ מהוצאת שבתות והוצאת י"ט והוצאת בניו לתלמוד תורה. שאם פחת פוחתין לו ואם הוסיף מוסיפין לו. See also Lev. R. 30, 1. Up to modern times the elementary teacher has been poorly paid everywhere.

<sup>40</sup> B. Batra 8b. Lev. R. 30, 2. Cf. Yalkut, 20 ad loc. Exodus 20, 2. Abodah Zarah 3b.

<sup>41</sup> Pes. 49b.

<sup>42</sup> Sanh. 17b. B. Batra 21b.

<sup>43</sup> Martial: Epigrams, 9, 68. See K. J. Freeman: Schools of Hellas, p. 81.

<sup>44</sup> E. g. trying to show what idealists the teachers were, one author says: "A teacher often gladly turned his class over to another more competent than himself." For proof he cites the case of the Sons of Betyra, who relinquished their presidency of the Sanhedrin to Hilel. See N. Drazin: op. cit. p. 73. Another identifies children teachers with men like R. Judah and R. Simeon. See S. J. Charne: בישראל לחולדות החינוך, pp. 119-122. See also B. Spiers: The School System of the Talmud, pp. 13-18. S. Stein: Schulverhältnisse im Talmud, pp. 9-13. J. Lewit: Theoretische und Praktische Pädagogik im Juedischen Altertume, pp. 33-34. These latter writings do not distinguish at all between the teacher of elementary — and the teacher of higher education.

#### CHAPTER IV: THE SCHOOL ORGANIZATION

<sup>1</sup> Boraita B. Batra 21a: מתיבי, אחד מבני חצר שביקש לעשות רופא אומן וגרדי: ומלמד תינוקות בני חצר מעכבין עליו.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> N. Morris: op. cit. p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> Hag. 15b: עייליה לבי כנישתא אחריתי א"ל לינוקי פסוק לי פסוק. ... עד דעייליה. לחלסר בי כנישתא.

<sup>5</sup> Ta'an. 23b: מאי טעמא יהיב מר לינוקא קשישא תרי ריכתא ולוטררא חדא א"ל: האי קאי בביתא והאי יתיב בבי כנישתא.

<sup>6</sup> Git. 58a: ארבע מאות בתי כנסיות היו בכרך ביתר ובכל אחת ואחת היו בה ארבע מאות תלמידי תינוקות. For a different version see Yer. Ta'an. 4, 8-69a. The obvious exaggeration of the cited numbers does not invalidate the usefulness of the reference for our purpose.

<sup>7</sup> Although archeological evidence points to a wide diversity of architectural designs, the synagogues followed the Temple pattern in providing segregated accommodations for the women.

<sup>8</sup> Yer. Meg. 3, 1-73d speaks of 480 such synagogues. In Yer. Ket. 13, beg. the number is 460, while the corresponding number in the Babylonian Talmud is 394, see Ket. 105a.

<sup>9</sup> E. g. Tos. Kel. B. Metzia 4, 4: כסוי בית דיו — "cover of an ink well." Mishnah Kel. 26, 3: בית אצבעות — "a glove." Sanh. 46a: בית קברות — "a cemetery." Yer. Shab. 8-38b: בית גוברין — "Bet Gubrin" (name of a community). For a detailed list see J. Levy: Woerterbuch, Vol. II, pp. 224-228.

<sup>10</sup> Larger communities had several synagogues scattered in various neighborhoods, see Tos. B. Kama 11, 3. Hag. 15. Ket. 105a. Git. 58a. Some synagogues were frequented by members of the same trade guild, see Meg. 26a. Nazir 42a. Jerusalem had synagogues organized by Jews of foreign extraction, see Tos. Meg. 2, 10. Acts 6, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Added to the economic hardships caused by the wars was the oppressive Roman taxation. In answer to a Jewish complaint Pescennius Niger, at the end of the second cent. replied: "Truly, if I had my way, I would even tax your air." See Scripturae Historiae Augustae, ed. D. Magie, Vol. I, Ch. VII. In Abot of R. N. a Jew is advised not to become too well known to the Roman authorities, because "They would kill him and take away all his property." See also A. Gulak: The Method of Collecting Taxes in Palestine, art. in Magnes Anniversary Book, pp. 97-104. A. Buechler: The Economic Conditions of Judea after the Destruction of the Second Temple.

<sup>12</sup> Yer. Meg. 3, 4-74a: רבי יהושע בן לוי אמר בתי כנסיות ובתי מדרשות להחכים ולתלמידיהם.

<sup>13</sup> On recent excavations of ancient synagogues see E. L. Sukenik: The Ancient Synagogues of Palestine and Greece, London 1934. M. Rostovtzeff: Dura-Europos and its Art, Oxford 1938, pp. 100-134.

<sup>14</sup> Yer. Shekalim 5 end-29b.

<sup>15</sup> Meg. 21a: ח"ר מימות משה ועד רבן גמליאל לא היו למדין תורה אלא מעומד. משמת רבן גמליאל ירד חולי לעולם והיו למדין תורה מיושב. The Hebrew word for sitting — "Yeshibah" became synonymous with an institute of higher learning in later times, see Sifre 48b. Abot 2, 7. Yer. Yoma 8, 8-45b. etc. The R. Gamaliel mentioned here is Rabban Gamaliel haZaken, who flourished at ca. 40 C. E. Cf. Sotah 49a. Pes. 88b. Acts 5, 34 et seq.

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle's school was called "Peripatetics," because of the fact, that discussions were carried on while "walking" in the groves of the academy.

<sup>17</sup> R. Juda carried a jug on his shoulders to the Bet haMidrash to sit on and R. Simeon carried a basket for the same purpose, see Ned. 49b. After the

demotion of R. Simon b. Gamaliel a number of benches were added at the academy of Yabneh to accommodate more students, Ber. 28a. Yer. Ta'an. 4, 1-67d. R. Simon b. Gamaliel and R. Joshua b. Korha were sitting on benches, while R. Eleazar b. R. Simon and R. Juda I were seated on the floor, B. Metzia 84b.

<sup>18</sup> Abot of R. N. 6, beg. ואל ישב לפניך לא על המטה ולא על הכסא ולא על ספסל. אלא ישב לפניך על הארץ. Cf. Yeb. 16a.

<sup>19</sup> Abot of R. N. 8, 6: .....לאחד שהיה לו בן קטן הניחו ויצא לשוק. עמד ונטל את המגילה והניחה בין ברכיו והיה יושב והתנה בה. כיון שבא אביו מן השוק אמר ראו בני קטן שהנחתיו ויצאתי לשוק. מה עשה? מעצמו למד ונטל את המגילה והניחה בין ברכיו והיה יושב ולומד בה היה כפוף ויושב לפני רבו. For the cross-legged posture cf. Shab. 51a:

<sup>20</sup> E. g. Abot 1, 4: "Sit at their (scholars) feet in the dust." Derek Eretz, beg. The student, who "soils his garment before the feet of the scholars." Num. R. 21, 12: In the Bet haMidrash of Moses Joshua "arranged the benches and spread out the mats."

<sup>21</sup> Tos. Kelim Batra 1, 3: ספסלין של מלמדי תינוקות. Krauss erroneously explains these benches to be children's benches. See S. Krauss: Talmudische Archaeologie, Vol. III, p. 206.

<sup>22</sup> The members of the Sanhedrin were seated in half-circle of three rows—Mishnah Sanh. 4, 3-4. A similar arrangement at the academy of Yabneh gave rise to the expression "the vineyard of Yabneh"—Mishnah Eduyot 2, 4. Yer. Ber. 4, 1-7d. Ber. 63b.

<sup>23</sup> Mishnah Yad. 3, 2-5.

<sup>24</sup> Soferim 3, 11. Cf. Tractate Sefer Torah 3, 9 and Soferim 3, 13 which read "chair" instead of "knees." According to Soferim 3, end and Shab. 14a it was forbidden to touch the scroll of the Torah with bare hands. See also Erubin 98a.

<sup>25</sup> Soferim 3, 13. For a variant reading see Tr. Sefer Torah 9, 10.

<sup>26</sup> Tos. Meg. 2, 2. Gen. R. 36, 12.

<sup>27</sup> Ket. 103b. B. Metia 85b.

<sup>28</sup> Ket. 50a. Tractate Derek Eretz 11. Meg. 27a and parallels.

<sup>29</sup> Soferim 5, 9: אין עושין שמע הלל מגילה לתינוקות (ואם עתיד להוסיף עליו מותר) ר' יהודה מתיר מן בראשית עד המבול מן ויקרא עד ויהי ביום השמיני ושאר כל הספרים אסור. "One must not make the Shema and Hallel into separate scrolls for children. (if he intends in the future to add to it, it is permissible — reading of the Gaon of Vilna and other manuscripts ad loc.) R. Juda permits it for Genesis, 1-5 and Leviticus, 1-8. But for all other books it is forbidden."

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Gitin 60a. Cf. Yoma 37b. In conclusion of this discussion the Talmud expands the permission to write such children's scrolls even for other parts of the Torah, again with the proviso, if "he intends to complete it." Ibid. Git.

<sup>32</sup> Tos. Meg. 3, 12. Meg. 27a. For example, the prohibition to hold the

scroll with one's bare hands applies only to the entire scroll of the Pentateuch. See Soferim 3, end. Shab. 14a.

<sup>33</sup> Yer. Meg. 4, 1-74a. Menahot 30a. Gitin 60a.

<sup>34</sup> Yer. Ta'an. 4, 8-69a: **היו מורכין כל אחד בספרו ושורפין אותו**. This is told by R. Simeon b. Gamaliel as an eye witness account.

<sup>35</sup> His prayer in Abot 5, 20 for the rebuilding of Jerusalem proves that he lived after the destruction of the city, while the omission of the title "Rabbi" from his name would indicate that he belonged to the early teachers.

<sup>36</sup> Abot 5, 21: בן חמש שנים למקרא, בן עשר למשנה, בן שלש עשרה למצוות, בן חמש עשרה לתלמוד.

<sup>37</sup> That J. b. T. did not mean these age limits to be taken literally is clear from the rest of his saying: "At twenty—to seek a livelihood, at thirty one has full strength, at forty—understanding, at fifty—counsel. . . ." Also, round numbers are better remembered.

<sup>38</sup> B. Batra 21a. Ket. 50a.

<sup>39</sup> Rab himself alludes to the strenuous schedule of learning when he says: "from six years on cram him like an ox." Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> B. Batra 21a: אמר רבא מתקנת יהושע בן גמלא ואילך לא ממטינן ינוקא ממתא למתא אבל מבי כנישתא ממטינן ואי מפסיק נהרא לא ממטינן ואי איכא תיתורא ממטינן ואי איכא גמלא לא ממטינן.

<sup>41</sup> Ket. 50a: דאמר אביי אמרה לי אם בר שית למקרא בר עשר למשנה. The woman Abaye is quoting was not really his mother, but because she had raised him he called her mother.

<sup>42</sup> Lev. R. 2, 1: למשנה ק' מהן ק' יוצא מקרא ובכנסין בני אדם שבעולם אלף בני אדם יוצאין מהן י' לתלמוד יוצא מן א'

באושא התקיננו שיהא אדם מתגלגל עם בנו עד שתיים עשרה שנה מכאן <sup>43</sup>Ket. 50a: ואילך יורד עמו לחייו.

א"ר אלעזר : צריך אדם להטפל בבנו עד י"ג שנה מכאן ואילך <sup>44</sup> Gen. R. 63, 14; צריך שיאמר ברוך שפטרני מעונשו שלזה.

כל י"ג שנה שניהם הולכים לבית הספר ושניהם באים מבית הספר לאחר י"ג.<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ked. 30a.

<sup>47</sup> Mekilta 22b: חייב אדם למול את בנו ולפרותו וללמדו תורה וללמדו אומנות. Cf. Tos. Kid. 1, 8. Kid. 29a. ולהשיאו אשה.

<sup>48</sup> See E. P. Cubberly: *Readings in the History of Education*, p. 24.

<sup>49</sup> Shab. 119b: אמר רב המנונא: לא חרבה ירושלים אלא בשביל שביטלו בה תינוקות של בית רבן. אמר ריש לקיש משום ר' יהודה נשיאה: אין העולם מתקיים אלא בשביל הכל תינוקות של בית רבן. ואמר ריש לקיש משום נשיאה: אין מבטלין תינוקות של בית רבן אפילו לבנין בית המקדש.

50 Ned. 37a.

<sup>51</sup> Mishnah Shab. 1, 3. Bor. Shab. 13a.

<sup>52</sup> Ned. 37b. See R. Nissim ad loc.

<sup>53</sup> Mishnah Hag. 1, 1.

<sup>54</sup> Ta'an 30a. According to a variant reading, quoted by Alfasi and R. Asher, ad loc. R. Meir did not free the children from school on the Ninth of Ab.

<sup>55</sup> Num. R. 12, 3. Another version mentions only Bible teachers. See Midrash T'hilim ed. Buber, p. 398, ad loc. Psalm 91. The reason for this order was the apprehension lest the heat of the day would cause any misfortune at this period of time, suspected to be fraught with lurking dangers.

<sup>56</sup> Louis Grossman: *Pedagogics*, art. *Jew. Enc.* Vol. IX, p. 572. Of the Friday he says, that then "the work done during the week was reviewed," although one line later he asserts, that "vacations occurred on days preceding the Sabbaths."

<sup>57</sup> According to the Shulkan Aruk, which bases its decisions upon the Talmud, only the second halves of the eves of Sabbaths and festivals were free from school. See *Yoreh Deah* 245, 12.

<sup>58</sup> For practices in Greek schools Cf. E. P. Cuddeby: *op. cit.* p. 24.

<sup>59</sup> Pes. 8b: *הני בני בי רב דדיירי בבאנא מהו למימי קדמא וחשוכא* בעו מיניה מרב: *לבי רב* . See Rashi ad loc.

<sup>60</sup> Kid. 30a.

<sup>61</sup> N. Drazin: *op. cit.* p. 62.

<sup>62</sup> Yer. Meg. 3, 4-74a: *א"ר יהושע בן לוי בתי כניסיות ובתי מדרשות לחכמים* ולחלמדיהם.

<sup>63</sup> Mishnah Shab. 1, 3.

<sup>64</sup> Exodus R. 47, 8: *לכן התקינו חכמים שיהו המשנין יושבין בבקר ובערב*.

## CHAPTER V: CURRICULUM OF INSTRUCTION

<sup>1</sup> Tos. Hag. 1, 3. Suk. 42a-b: *בציצית חייב בלולב להתעטף חייב בציצית*.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. *ידע לדבר* אביו מלמדו שמע ותורה ולשון קדש ואם לאו ראוי לו שלא בא לעולם. Sifre 46b reads: "When the child begins to speak, his father speaks to him in Hebrew and teaches him Torah. If he does not speak to him in Hebrew and does not teach him Torah, it is as if he would have buried him."

<sup>3</sup> By the term "Torah" in the quotation: 'should teach him Shema and Torah' is meant the verse: "Moses commanded us the Torah . . .," which in Hebrew begins with the word "Torah." Torah itself he began to study in the Bet haSefer. Cf. Suk. 32a.

<sup>4</sup> Maimonides: *Yad haHazakah*, *Hilkot Talmud Torah* 1, 6.

<sup>5</sup> On the time Aramaic displaced Hebrew as the vernacular and the extent of its use see Th. Noeldeke: *Die Semitischen Sprachen*. J. Wellhausen: *Israelitische und Juedische Geschichte*. A. Buechler: *Die Priester und der Kultus*. J. Klausner: *הבית השני בגולתו* in *הספרות היפה בישראל*. S. Zeitlin: *Judaism as a Religion*, JQR, XXXIV, No. 3.

<sup>6</sup> That many scholars oftentimes did use Hebrew as language of instruction is evident from their many sayings which are quoted verbatim and in their original form.

וכן היה ר' מאיר אומר כל הדר בא"י וקורא: 7 Sifre 333b. Yer. Shek. 3, 4-47c: ק"ש שחרית וערבית ומדבר בלשון הקודש הרי הוא בן העולם הבא.

8 Mag. 18a.

9 Sotah 49b: והא"ר בא"י לשון סורסי למה אלא אי לשון הקודש אי לשון יוונית.

10 Shab. 31a: ת"ר מעשה בנכרי אחד . . . בא לפני הלל גייריה ימא קמא אמר ליה: א"ב ג"ד למחר אפיך ליה.

11 Abot of R. N. 6, 2: הלך הוא ובנו וישבו אצל מלמדי תינוקות א"ל רבי למדני תורה אחזו רבי עקיבא בראש הלוח ובנו בראש הלוח כתב לו אלף בית ולמדה אלף תיו ולמדה הלך וישב בינו לבין עצמו ואמר אלף זה למה נכתבה בית זה למה נכתבה.

12 P. Monroe: Text Book in the History of Education, p. 32.

13 Meg. 24b: תניא נמי הכי אין מורידין לפני התיבה לא אנשי בית שאן ולא אנשי . . . Cf. Yer. Ber. 2, 4-4d.

14 Erubin 53b: דמשאל להו לבני יהודה דדייקי לישנא.

15 Mishnah Ber. 1, 1-2.

16 Soferim 5, 9. Gitin 60a. See above p. 91.

17 Ibid.

18 Deut. R. 8, beg. תחלה אומרים לו: תחלה קורא במגלה. היאך אדם לומד תורה? תחלה אומרים לו: תחלה קורא במגלה. משווא גומר את המקרא שונה את ואחר כך בספר ואחר כך בנביאים ואחר כך בכתובים. התלמוד ואחר כך בהלכות ואחר כך באגדות.

19 Lev. R. 7, 3: אמר ר' אסי מפני מה מתחילין לתינוקות בתורת כהנים ואין מתחילין: בבראשית? אלא שהתינוקות סהורין והקרובות סהורין יבאו סהורין ויתעסקו בטהורים.

20 Soferim 5, 9.

21 Abot of R. N. 6, 2.

22 W. Bacher: Jahrbuch, 1873, p. 61. Cf. S. Krauss: Talmudische Archaeologie, Vol. III, p. 235.

23 Mishnah Rosh Hash. 4, 3. Pes. 115a.

24 N. Morris' belief, that the custom originated "Probably after the defeat of Bar Cochba" is disproven by R. Akiba's much earlier compliance with this custom. See Abot of R. N. 6, 2.

25 Tos. Meg. 3, 19: והסופר מלמד כדרכו. That כדרכו may be translated with "without omission" is evident from the context.

26 Mishnah 4, 5. See also Tos. Meg. 3, 5, 13. Soferim 14, 15. R. Judah b. Ilai even permitted a minor to read publicly the Scroll of Esther, see Mishnah Meg. 2, 4. Tos. Meg. 2, 4.

27 Meg. 29b.

28 The canonization of the Bible occurred about the middle of the third century B.C.E. The books of Ezekiel, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, Song of Song however remained problematic and were discussed as late as ca. 65 C.E. and 150 C.E. See S. Zeitlin: An Historical Study of the Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures, Philadelphia, 1933.

29 See Hulin 95b. Git. 56a. 58a. 68a. Hag. 15a. Ta'an. 9b.

30 Mikra as Bible: "This is Torah . . . this is Mikra . . . this is Mishnah . . . this is Talmud. . ."—Sifre 317b. R. Johanan b. Zakkai did not fail to

study Mikra, Mishnah, Halakot, Agadot. . .”—Suk. 28a. B. Batra 134a. R. Meir said: “I will answer you not with a verse from Mikra, nor with a Mishnah but with common sense”—Koh. R. 5, 12. Mikra as Pentateuch: “A man should conform his own readings with the public readings, two times Mikra and one time Targum”—Ber. 8a. “The book of the Torah of God is Mikra”—Ned. 37b.

<sup>31</sup> Sotah 49b.

<sup>32</sup> Mishnah Meg. 1, 8, 2, 8. Shab. 16, 1. Sotah 7, 1. Tos. Meg. 2, 3, 2, 3. Meg. 17b.

<sup>33</sup> Sifre 161b: לידי תרגום מביא לידי משנה מביא לידי תלמוד תלמוד חלמוד מביא לידי מעשה. “The study of Mikra leads to Targum, Targum to Mishnah, Mishnah to Talmud, Talmud to practice and practice to the fear of God.”

<sup>34</sup> Mishnah Ber. 3, 3: ושיים ועבדים וקטנים . . . . . וחייבין בתפלה ובמוזוה ובברכת המזון.

<sup>35</sup> Tos. Shab. 13, 3. Shab. 115b. Yer. Shab. Shab. 16, 1-15c. On fluidity of version of grace after meals see Ber. 46b. 48b. Ta'an. 31a. B. Batra 121b. On development of the “Eighteen Benedictions” see I. Elbogen: Geschichte des Achtzehngebets, Breslau 1903. Studien zur Geschichte des Gottesdienstes, Berlin 1907, pp. 43-48. E. Levy: יסודות התפלה, Tel Aviv, 1947, pp. 135-154.

<sup>36</sup> On the method of the responsive recital of the Shema see I. Elbogen's explanation of שמע על שמע Geschichte des Juedischen Gottesdienstes, pp. 3-13. On the responsive reading of the Hallel see Sotah 30b.

<sup>37</sup> Mishnah Meg. 4, 6: קטן קורא בתורה ומתרגם אבל אינו פורס על שמע ואינו עובר לפני התורה ואינו נושא את כפיו.

<sup>38</sup> Tos. Sotah 6, 2 ed. Zuckerman: כקטן שהוא קורא את ההלל בבית הסופר. Cf. Yer. Sotah 5, 6-20c. For a variant reading see Sotah 30b.

<sup>39</sup> Mishnah Sanh. 10, 1: “The following have no share in the world to come . . . R. Akiba says, even he who reads the outside books.” Cf. Koh. R. 12, 13: “He who brings more than twenty-four books (books of the Bible) into his house, brings confusion into it.”

<sup>40</sup> See L. Loew: Graphische Requisiten und Erzeugnisse bei den Juden. L. Blau: Buchwesensn. S. Krauss: Talmudische Archaeologie, Vol. III, Ch. XI.

<sup>41</sup> E. g. Shopkeepers made their entries in a פנקס — Mishnah Sheb. 7, 1. Abot 3, 16. Farmers would write the name of God as a charm upon the horn of their cow — Soferim 5, 13.

<sup>42</sup> Yer. Ta'an. 4, 8-69a: חני רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר . . . . . ויהו אומרים אם באו השונאים עלינו במכתובים הללו אנו יוצאין עליהן ומנקרים את עיניהם.

<sup>43</sup> Tos. Shab. 12, 10: כתלמיד שהוא כותב בידו וכותב חייב.

<sup>44</sup> Cant. R. 1, 15: כתלמיד שהוא כותב ורבו מיישב על סף. Gen. R. 1, 5: פעם אחת נמצא המלך עובר בשוק אמר טלו מילין וקלמין זו לבני.

<sup>45</sup> Soferim 1, 13. The decision was against the ritual value of such a

scroll, because it was assumed that not enough concentration of piety by the minor went into the making of the scroll.

<sup>46</sup> S. Krauss: op. cit. Vol. III, p. 133.

<sup>47</sup> N. Morris: op. cit. p. 83.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. E. Schuerer: *Geschichte des Juedischen Volkes*, Vol. II, pp. 57-89. S. Lieberman: *Greek in Jewish Palestine*, p. 39.

<sup>49</sup> The fondness for Greek was based upon the verse: "God enlarge Japhet" (Gen. 9, 27). Japhet was the father of Javan, the Hebrew name for Greek—Yoma 9b. Meg. 9b. E. g. R. Simeon b. Gamaliel decided, that the only foreign language in which the Torah could be written was Greek—Mishnah Meg. 1, 8. Cf. Mishnah Git. 9, 8. Judah I wanted only Hebrew or Greek to be spoken in Palestine—Sotah 49b. Cf. Yer. Sotah 9, 16-24c. Gen. R. 16, 7. 36, 12.

<sup>50</sup> Mishnah Sotah 9, 14.

<sup>51</sup> Sotah 49b. B. Kama 83a: אלף ילדים היו בבית אבא חמש מאות מהם למדו חכמה יונית תורה חמש מאות למדו חכמה יונית.

<sup>52</sup> Sotah 49b. The "government" is the Roman administration of Palestine. This is another indication of the extent of the Hellenistic culture in the Graeco-Roman world.

<sup>53</sup> E. g. When Titus offered the Jews of Jerusalem surrender terms he sent Josephus to talk to them in their native language—Josephus: *Wars*, V, 9-2. Paul likewise addressed the Jews of Jerusalem in their own language—Acts XXI, 40. XXII, 2.

<sup>54</sup> Yer. Pe'ah 1, 1-24c. Tos. Abodah Z. 1, 3. Men. 99b.

<sup>55</sup> Mishnah Sotah 9, 14: בפולמוס של אספסינוס גזרו על עטרות חתנים ועל האירוס בפולמוס של טיטוס גזרו על עטרות כלות ושלא ילמד אדם אה בנו יונית בפולמוס האחרון גזרו שלא תצא הכלה באפריין בתוך העיר.

<sup>56</sup> Sotah 49b.

<sup>57</sup> "The Mishnah on which the Palestinian Talmud Rests," ed. W. H. Lowe, Sotah 9-105b.

<sup>58</sup> Seder Olam R. Ch. 30.

<sup>59</sup> Abodah Z. 15b: ומוסרין להם תינוק ללמדו ספר וללמדו אומנות.

## CHAPTER VI: METHODS OF INSTRUCTION

<sup>1</sup> Baba Batra 21a.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid: כי מחית לינוקא לא תימחי אלא בערקתא דמסנא.

<sup>4</sup> The great Roman educator and rhetorician Quintillian (Ca. 35-97 C.E.) was, as far as it is known, the only one who protested against the practice of flogging school children: "No man should be allowed so much authority over an age so weak and so unable to resist ill-treatment," *Institutio Oratoria*, bk. I, Ch. 3, 17.

<sup>5</sup> Ta'an. 24a.

<sup>6</sup> See above pp. 76-77.

<sup>7</sup> Yer. Meg. 1, 11-71d: Cf. Gen. R. 1, 15 for a variant reading.

<sup>8</sup> Shab. 104a:

<sup>9</sup> Charles B. Gulick: Athenians, Loeb Classical Library, Vol. IV, pp. 555-563.

<sup>10</sup> Modern scholars agree, that the Hebrew vowel system did not exist before 500 C.E. Cf. W. Chomsky: The History of the Vowel System, JQR, Vol. XXXII, 1941, pp. 27-49.

<sup>11</sup> Ber. 12b: Meg. 22a: כל פסוקא דלא פסקיה משה און לא פסקינן.

<sup>12</sup> Meg. 22a. Ta'an. 27b: אמר רבי חנינא קרא צער גדול היה לי אצל ר' חנינא הגדול ולא התיר לי לפסוק אלא לתלמידיו של בית רבן הואיל ולהתלמד עשין.

<sup>13</sup> Erubin 54b: א"ר אלעזר חייב אדם לשנות לתלמידיו ארבעה פעמים... ר"ע אומר: מגיין שחייב אדם לשנות לתלמידיו עד שילמדנו....

<sup>14</sup> Ned. 37b. Its antiquity is evident from the fact of the discussion on the date of its origin. Rab puts it in the time of Moses.

<sup>15</sup> Ned. 37a.

<sup>16</sup> Erubin 53b-54a.

<sup>17</sup> Sanh. 99b: ר' עקיבא אומר זמר בכל יום וזמר בכל יום. Tos. Ohalot 16, 4. Tos. Parah 4, 4 ר"ע אומר זמר בה תזריא

<sup>18</sup> Soferim 3, 10. Meg. 32a: אמר ר' יוחנן כל הקורא בלא נעימה ושונה בלא זימרה עליו הכתוב אומר וגם אני נתתי להם חוקים לא טובים

<sup>19</sup> IV Maccabees: The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, ed. R. H. Charles, Oxford 1913, p. 685.

<sup>20</sup> Mishnah Meg. 4, 4: לא יקרא למתורגמן יותר מפסוק אחד ובנביא שלשה.

<sup>21</sup> Mishnah Meg. 4, 4: קטן קורא בתורה ומתרגם.

<sup>22</sup> Tos. Meg. end: ר' יהודה אומר המתרגם פסוק בצורתו הרי זה בדאי והמוסיף הרי זה מגדף.

<sup>23</sup> Abot of R. N. 24, 6. Shab. 147b. Sanh. 99a. Tos. Chahot 16, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Hag. 9b: אינו דומה שונה פרקו מאה פעמים לשונה פרקו מאה ואחד. Ta'an 8a. Erubin 54b. Cf. Ber. 28a. Meg. 7b. Pes. 72a. Ket. 22b. 50a.

<sup>25</sup> Mishnah Pes. 10, 4: ולפי דעתו של בן אביו מלמדו.

<sup>26</sup> Abot 5, 12, 5, 15.

<sup>27</sup> Abot 2, 5: ולא הקפדן מלמד.

<sup>28</sup> Ta'an. 8a: רבא אמר אם ראית תלמיד שלמדו קשה עליו כברול בשביל רבו שאינו מסיביר לו פנים.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Sifra 1, 8.

<sup>30</sup> Hulin 24a: תלמיד שלא ראה סימן יפה במשנתו ה' שנים טוב אינו רואה. ר' יוסי אומר ג' שנים.

<sup>31</sup> Abot 6 (Kinyan Torah), 6.

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